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OLIVE GILBREATH



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MISS AMERIKANKA



*"How lovely you are in that white
frock, Amerikanka"*

MISS AMERIKANKA

A Story

BY
OLIVE GILBREATH

ILLUSTRATED BY
SIGISMUND de IVANOWSKI



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

MISS AMERICANEA

**Copyright, 1918, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America
Published March, 1918**

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PART I

MISS AMERIKANKA

I

THE CHINESE EXPRESS

IF the angel Uriel were casting an all-seeing eye on the Manchurian plain to-night he might observe a feeble fly crawling across its great white coverlet. If he were omniscient as well, he might answer the riddle that revolves in my mind—why this vast whiteness does not rush in and blot out the one thing that dares move and have being in the face of its immensity—and what madness it is that sets a woman wandering a night like this. Twenty-four hours ago I sat content behind the walls of Peking. Why to-night am I a roamer in these white wastes? From my window in the Chinese express, steadily scurrying northward, I watch the moon climb up out of those lonely borders of China.

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we are just leaving. Is she saying us farewell, or does she, looking down on a land too wise to be restless, only smile at the folly of wandering? And there in Peking the kites hang over the courts and the sound of the wind is in the sycamores. One moment more behind the walls of the old gray city and I had been deaf to the call of the great world outside—so faintly it falls there in the gardens of Asia.

Across the aisle the General dozes in his great red-lined cape-coat, his piratical mustache doing solitary duty in his military face; over the top of my seat a tall astrakhan cap blots the dim window space like an advertisement of "Popoff's Popular Tea"; the cap signifies Dmitri Nikolaivitch Novinsky, attaché of the legation in Peking. Could *une jeune Américaine* possess two stranger guardians? The whole affair is incredible. It is necessary to record it carefully, methinks, to make sure I am not a little mad.

In the first place, am I the person who voyaged across the Pacific for a wedding in the Orient—Lise's wedding—little Lise, that piquant figure whom Chance threw across my path in Egypt, grown since a permanent figure in my world; little Lise reared in every



*"Why am I a roamer in these
white wastes?"*

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unknown corner of diplomacy in the East; little Lise, a woman choosing now a mate, setting out on the long, long trail—passed on into an unfamiliar land into which I can no longer follow her? The images make it seem more than half a dream: the lights gleaming across the spaces of cool dark floors, yellow figures in brocades, flaming Oriental characters of joy on all the windows, the color of diplomatic uniforms, Lise's father silent and dark, Lise herself in her film of white, and that strange, *strange* expression.

Granted this, am I, further, the person who three months ago was caravanning in Mongolia? Can it be that for *any one* the world, three months ago, was wool-caravans emerging through the morning mists; horsemen mysteriously silhouetted against the horizon; shimmering gold of rape-fields and deep indigo distances? It is strange to enter the desert, but stranger still to come out to a world disrupting. Plunge a man into chaos out of a solitude starred with gentian, larkspur, and a tiny creeping moonflower, if you would break his rhythm of joy.

"What has happened down there since we have been up here in eternity?" I remember

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it was Lise's philosophical French friend who pondered, as the slow cart-wheels bore us along the great road which for ages has poured the caravans into China.

"Nothing!" I replied, dogmatically. "Nothing ever happens down there in the world."

It was one night while the caravaners sat on the *k'ang* of a mud-walled inn, beyond the Great Wall, that the news of the war came, creeping in there on the fringe of things, like rumors of the Judgment Day; a messenger splashing the white dust of the road, despatches in his bag for the living Buddha in Urga, but no idea in his flat Mongol head of who was friend and who was foe. All along the road the next day it was the same tale: we questioned the Chinese hawkers with cages swung on poles across their shoulders, but they had no news beyond the price of thrushes; the Russian tea-merchant, too, was uninformed—but the canny merchant was folding his blue summer tent and stealing away to the north! In the sun-baked border city Kalgan, the tobacco men—young Britishers and Americans—announced "*Der Tag*." Adventist missionaries prophesied the coming of Christ and prepared to ascend in chariots

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of fire, while we scurried for the first train to Peking.

Far and swift a man may travel alone, but when danger threatens—the call of the pack. The fierce hunger of kind for kind which ran through my blood, as we struck through the Great Wall and raced by train down that narrow pass for Peking, shot a light on some of Old Nature's secrets. Every moment the air thickened with the sense of something sinister like a dust-storm from the Gobi. Something was happening over there—the world was breaking up—not this barbarism, but civilization—our world—and we were barred *outside!* In Peking the storm broke; Peking seething with chaos such as dazed us, children of the desert. The banks, the legation, the Wagon Lits swarmed angrily—knots of French, German, British, Austrians gathered on the corners. Over there, across Asia, the world was breaking up. Legation Street, where rickshas passed to afternoon tea, clattered with the horses of the French guard in red and blue capes—off to Europe; Sikhs at the gates of the British legation tightened their red turbans and caressed their carbines with lustrous eyes; and the industrious little

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browns, under cover of a legation guard, poured in sufficient troops to take the Chinese capital. Peking is a mountain-top; but the old gray city has seen few finer spectacles in the valleys below than the first records of the cosmic earthquake—all under the apricot-tiled and tilted roofs in the sunny August weather!

Et moi! I, too, wished to stream toward Europe. And why not? Russia has always been my desire, since I could remember my godmother's first reading to me Russian poetry.

Shall I ever forget the smell of that Chinese rain swirling down Legation Street as I picked my way across to the double-eagle bronze gates behind which the Russians had handsomely consoled themselves after the Boxer indiscretion? Even before the *trek* into Mongolia, and before the war-lords had frowned, I had paid my gold for a ticket across Siberia. Why should one's Government send ministers abroad so firmly and paternally to forbid one's heart's desire? The Russians would be more kind. I passed the wildish dun-colored Cossack guard at the double-eagle gates. In ante-bellum days I had dined

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with Lise's friends behind these same bronze gates, but the great white houses, barren as bird-cages, seemed to have increased in number and imposingness. The blond First Secretary, who maintains Russia's reputation for diplomacy in the East, was far less fearsome than the Cossack guard, his eyes a Botticelli blue even against the blue walls of his study; the hands, which toyed with a bronze paper-weight, white and powerful, with fine golden hair at the wrists.

"To cross Siberia! *Ny, Mademoiselle!*" He shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands in a Slavic gesture. "The road is crowded, jammed with men and horses and guns. Who knows? You might be left for weeks in a Siberian village."

"*Shto dyelatch*, Monsieur? I have long ago given my heart to Russia. I have all but put my eyes out over your queer diddling alphabet, and now that it is really fascinating, you forbid it. *Shto dyelatch?*"

"*'Shto dyelatch!*' Ah, Mademoiselle." He put down the paper-weight; he smiled; his eyes searched me acutely for symptoms of a spy, and he smiled again—the smile of a big country. "*Nu vot!* the road may clear. I

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will send you across, but it may be months. Have you Russian patience?"

Patience! I could give points to Job in several languages. Three months I have sat behind the walls of the old gray city. I am so disorganized with patience that the sight of a *chit*, delivered this morning by a coolie from the Russian legation, sucked at my breath like "the sight of a tiger's tail in the spring." Had any one supposed that I really wished to cross to Russia, to leave this apricot-tiled city, the "last rampart of romance"?

"MADEMOISELLE [the note ran in Russian—an inconvenient compliment],—The trans-Siberian is still crowded with troops. It is no time for a traveler—least of all a woman—to be abroad. [I could see the 'giant First Secretary driving the words along under the signed portrait of Nicholas II.] "One of our Generals leaves to-morrow, however, with an attaché. The General will be pleased to look after your safeguard. If you must go—*bon voyage!*"

Bon voyage into these desolate wastes!

Before the steppe completely annihilates us, I wish to record one fact! It is not I who wills this journey. It is something quite im-

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personal within me, that something which permits me no word as to the size, shape, or color of my destiny; that uncaring something packed my luggage, bought a Mongolian dogskin for bitter nights and pitched me into this! If it is gipsy blood, bad 'cess to it. If it is career—worse 'cess to it! The only concession to *me* was of the finest silk in Silk Street, turquoise blue, and neat about the ankles! I shiver over my dogskin rug at this level wildness. "Only fools enter Siberia in mid-winter," I can hear Peking warn—I know she speaks truth—as the train pulls out and she slams the shadows of the Ch'e-men against us, and then, to give point to her wisdom, slowly, one by one, drops her four massive walls—barricading us outside in snow-dunes, which threaten to rush in and blot us out, who dare move in the face of their infinity.

The sun was tumbling out of a Chinese-blue sky when I awoke this morning. Since the General has looked in to inquire after the health of *l'Américaine*, I feel less certain of extinction. Very *distingué* the General, with his lean body, his Hindenburg mustache and his eagle look, hurrying to join the staff at the front. He wears fatigue dress—blue trousers

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with a red stripe at the side, a khaki-colored coat and a cross of St. George where the collar closes. I had not met him until I became his protégée, but I have a vivid image of this military figure clattering down Morrison Street with outriders. M. Novinsky, the attaché, is a slim, exquisite Russian with long eyes and a serene smile, as immaculate as if he had just stepped from Piccadilly; a type of Russian incredible to Americans bred on lithographs of stout gentlemen in Cossack beards and flannel shirts. We sat opposite at dinner once in the great white *glavnaya missiya* and have bowed since from our passing rickshas. Curiously enough, I remember him from among the other attachés and secretaries.

It was while I was standing at the window this afternoon, watching the purple hills of Shan-hai-kwan blocking themselves ruggedly in the sunset and wishing that I might see the Great Wall, after fourteen hundred miles of mountain-tops, take its leap into the sea, when this finished product of civilization joined me.

"You are sad to leave the East, Mademoiselle?" he asked, with a quaint precision of

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enunciation and a timbre of voice distinctly un-English.

"Yes," I admitted, a bit disconsolately, lifting my gaze to an immaculate collar. "Is it not absurd? With every moment the old gray walls unroll, I realize that I am leaving what are no longer symbols of a strange civilization, but signs of a land dearly beloved."

"No, it is not absurd," he returned, gravely, with his eyes on the liquid amethyst of the mountains, while the train rushed on into the hollow North. "It depends upon what you ask of a land. If it is to forget days that are 'sullen and gray and bereft,' China, more than any other land, except Egypt, can gild life with romance."

I glanced at the neatly knit figure, the beautifully cut mouth and melancholy eyes turned on the steppe. A figure I could have imagined in Japan, but in great, dirty, picturesque China—never.

"Is it that one may not ask for romance?" I inquired. "What will your Great Russia give?"

"Russia?" he repeated slowly, as the temple roofs of a walled city emerged from the

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dusk, "Russia—something far more poignant and homely than this!"

Nu, each to his own East. The Slav to his, whatever it may be, and I to mine—the junks, and the pagodas among the azaleas, and the sound of the wind in the bamboo groves.

Twenty-four hours to the north as the geese fly! Twenty-four hours of blue figures bending rhythmically in fields and of quaint roofs angling the sky! Twenty-four hours I had been lost in the dream that the Chinese themselves dreamed for thousands of honorable years, that never could one pass the boundaries of the Middle Kingdom—when something new shot out of the day's end—the gas-lights of a modern station, trains shrieking, porters hurrying luggage.

"Mukden!" The General's red-lined cape gleamed in the dusky car at the door of my compartment. "Civilization and soap. *Made-moiselle!*"

Civilization and soap! It was like being rolled from a silken scroll into a twentieth-century serial.

"Civilization and soap," I shuddered. Over there in the dark, somewhere, there were an-

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cient Manchu palaces. I peered into the darkness pendent with silver mists.

"Yes." His excellency tightened his belt. "There is just time for dinner. You will find Japanese creditable cooks."

When the two had departed to consult the little brown Swiss of the East I voyaged about the station sniffing the variegated *potpourri* of the Orient. The station was unpromisingly modern, but its occupants were drawn from the oldest reservoirs of life in the world. Chinese and Japanese sprawled in sundry attitudes and varied garments; a Korean sat in the corner, in his bird-cage hat; on the floor lay bundles of fur. Bundles of fur! After these, nothing held me. Sleeping Russians they were, in from the Far North, that mysterious *terra incognita* into which within an hour we ourselves should be whirling.

The terror of that first plunge into the bitter shadowy night of the Farther North! Peking had been but a prelude; this was the precipice. Mukden itself is wind-swept enough—Heaven knows!—huddling there in the pale of the Arctic storms; but, at least, it has lights, humanity, and roofs. Its soft-winking beacons called across the snow like lorelei—

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lorelei of fires and hearth. I confess that I watched them dim and vanish across the widening white with no slight misgiving and a frenzied desire to rush back and claim sanctuary before it was too late. But there was no turning back. The mists had begun to shroud us in their phantom pall. We were already committed to the steppe.

They are wonderfully sympathetic, these Russians, and deeply and properly impressed with the responsibility of *l'Américaine*. The General says that I am not American, but north Italian in type; M. Novinsky does not comment upon my type. They were standing guard over my place when I turned from my vigil at the window, and then I discovered the reason. The world was present but not his wife. With the exception of the feminine, it was a miniature cosmos. Seven fat Chinese disposed their fur-lined brocades and settled their *embonpoint* comfortably on the seats; nine Japanese tucked their feet under cumulative kimonos; the Standard Oil men, trimmers of the "lamp of Asia," the Swedish minister, the General, and M. Novinsky settled in their greatcoats. Each traveler drew about him whatever mantle race had

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provided him. The car stared internationally and then fell into slumber. That is, all but M. Novinsky, whom I could see from the corner of one sleepy eye, proud as Lucifer, immobile as the Buddha of Kamakura, while opposite him a wadded Chinese slept the unconcerned sleep of the East. The aristocratic tradition is, I have observed, sometimes inconvenient.

Mukden had been cold, but this place where I awoke surely went below thermometer range. The British-American Tobacco man and the Standard Oil men had vanished in the night—the last symbol erased from my familiar world. Frost eliminated the landscape. From a hollow drumlike distance came the sound of bells, deep-toned Buddhists and momentary ecstasies punctuating the boom of the great ones. The General had disappeared, but M. Novinsky stood at my elbow, pale as Hamlet, but glossily booted and shining as to hair. It seemed an unconventional morning encounter with an immaculate attaché of the Russian legation!

“What is it, a Charpentier opera?” I demanded, trying to make a clearing in the white rime of my window.

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"No Charpentier, but Changchun," said M. Novinsky, rescuing my Mongolian rug from the claws of a rapacious coolie. "For us it is breakfast."

"Changchun?" I had a painfully confused sense of Beveridge and Putnam Weale. "I know!" I cried, with sudden enlightenment. "The far shore line of Great Russia where the 'gray stream of men carrying ikons, children and wives crawls down upon Manchuria never to retreat.'"

"*Totchno*," agreed M. Novinsky. "You speak in the language of an Imperial ukase. At least, Mademoiselle, if your feet never stray to the Back of the Beyond—at least you have stood where the East and the North tryst."

The hotel is only a stone's throw from the station, but the General and M. Novinsky stowed me in a *troika* and we dashed up in the manner of a De Quincy stage-coach, as befitted our rank. It is next to being a cousin to royalty to travel with a General. The Russian has a taste for the dramatic which he seems to gratify. Every one from the manager to the smallest *maltchik* draws himself up when we appear, while the General sails

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through the line, very fierce, very *distingué*, like the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievitch himself.

And now the escort pay etiquette calls at the Russian Consulate while I finish my *Amur caviare* and read the Manchurian wool market to the bells of the Near and Far East. Extraordinary paradoxes, these Russians; the most easy-going people of the globe, and the most punctilious. At least, that is the General. Monsieur Novinsky, though of far older blood, I fancy, seems deeper rooted in gentleness. Two Samoyedes steal past me in long surtouts and close fur caps. Are they also of the same nationality as the General and M. Novinsky? Already I sense a nation which is "not a nation but a world."

"I shall burn a candle in that Chinese temple to this *unco*' strange journey," I announce, as the escort depart.

"Better a taper for Nicolas, the Wonder-worker," the General calls over the top of his fur collar. "The Russian gods are jealous gods. And these are the skirts of Great Russia!"

II

A WAR SPECIAL

A WAR SPECIAL! An *edition de luxe* war special for Russia! Am I dreaming? I rub my finger along the leather seats and the mahogany casing. The white perspective of Harbin streets through the window vanishes a bit unreally but the *izvostchiks* are solid enough, and the Cossacks clumping about with bread, and the shaggy ponies. And there through the world, in the direction my heels point, prosaic creatures are sitting in offices, attending committees and taking the elevated!

Ivan Caspitch, the General's orderly, a taffy-colored Grenadier, has just brought a samovar and red-currant jam. Ivan Caspitch's idea of the world is sorrow, which must be drowned in tea and jam. It is the Russian post-train that has left me like this, a fossil of prehistoric man, caught through the

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ages with my knees under my chin, and the object of Ivan Caspitch's pity.

"Like the Russian Government," M. Novinsky declares the post, "meant to develop an eyeless, mindless, collapsible creature."

For myself I should not have minded, but it offended my sense of things as they should be to see the General's glory eclipsed in a crevice. Deep frost covered the window, eliminating the landscape. It was too dark to read, and one of the Forbiddens was to lower the candle which warred with the Powers of Darkness in the upper regions of the car. The guard, a surreptitious person in a vast beard, hovered about the door, peering in at irregular intervals as if to surprise it out of us.

"Whatever it is, I do not know," I protested to the General at the end of a tortuous hour, "but for the grace of God and having been born in America, I might be in the Siberian salt-mines."

"You should have become accustomed to spying in Japan," suggested the General.

"Japanese spying is something tangible," I argued. "If one must have his luggage ransacked, the Japanese do it deftly and pack

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things more neatly than they came out. And if they poke holes in the *shoji*—after all, they are their own *shoji*. But this—this is an evil spell.”

“It may be a bad system, but it works. Russia needs a strong hand.” The General pulled his long mustache.

The train-master had announced that we should be in Harbin by eleven, but this statement was Oriental tact and not truth. It was two before we saw a delicate coronet of lights scattering on the shining disk of plain. I buried my nose in my dogskin; the cold would crumple me up like a mimosa leaf, while the Russians would step forth heroically into their element, their native North. And then I discovered another of Old Nature's secrets. The Russians pulled their furs and shivered in their greatcoats. Too many centuries had winds from glaciers blown in their faces, and laid deep in their memory a race-terror, while I, with a less bitter ancestral memory, breathed greedily of freedom and the ecstasy of space! Sky, black velvet and crystal; stars, pendent points of light, and the plain a luminous blue-white reflector; horses with high-arched collars; furs shag-

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gily blotching the snow. A magnificent fantasmie. It rushed upon me, an engulfing sea. It was the North—the Siberian North! It rocked in my ears like a storm; the brilliant savage North! I looked to the horizons; in every direction sped these terrible white distances. Somewhere there in those prehistoric gulfs, Breshkovskaya had kept burning her lamp, and Dostoevski, Gorky, and countless hundreds of the flaming hearts of Russia.

The station was dank and dreary after the sonorous level of the steppe, dank and dreary and futile as are all things human after great spaces. I was glad that the General was Viking-tall and easy to follow, for the crowd moved about with a weary, troubled confusion. Everything was written anew in symbols of the North. Everybody was fur-clad, *cap-à-pie* even to the newsgirl. I liked the skin-side-inside-fur-side-outside coats of the *nosiltchiki*, perhaps because I liked the *nosiltchiki* themselves; burly, bearded chaps, with the vigor of the North in their sinews and the fear of God in their faces. But it was murky after the steppe. And the smell! It rose in clouds like incense, it descended like London fog—an intermingling of the odors of horses,

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sheep, *koumiss*, and unwashed humanity; the smell which the Mongolian tents take on from sheltering the little "brothers of the field"—calves and new-born lambs; the "distinctive but not unpleasant" odor of which the great Tolstoi writes. I was tired with the rocking of the train, and cumulatively sleepy, and I had grave doubts whether Tolstoi were not, after all, a barbarian.

The man whose lantern has two sides—East and West—soon becomes an epicure of contrasts. The delight I take in nights spent in a mud-walled Mongolian inn among the wool-carts, set over against the memory of the Savoy in season, is more thrilling than any a collector of Whistler wrests from his treasure. And I hug now the joy I shall take in a bill for nine cents—night's lodging for seven people, three horses and a donkey—against my next squandering of gold in the tents of the West.

I was lost in my musing when the General and M. Novinsky plucked me from contemplation of the skin coats.

"No train to-night!" The General drew his great red-lined cape about him and led the way outside to the hotel sleighs. What would the Savoy or the Plaza say to such a

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trio at such an hour? Doubtless a superb contrast to the comment of the bearded genii who presides here on the edge of things where the Ten Commandments are not, characterized by curiosity but no phrases.

"One piecee A-number-one laidee," he said to the Chinese boy in blue. "One piecee A-number-one room."

"*How*," acquiesced the Celestial, and with a simple *how* I was committed to a room, sealed but for one hinged pane; there I slept the sleep of the East under a goatskin rug. I discovered the next morning that the sheets were exquisite table linen. I cannot explain why, but it is Russian that they should have been so, especially Siberian Russian, but it is true. Harbin has the atmosphere of a gold camp. But the memory of that night—the mingling of alien voices, Japanese and Russian, that rose from that fetid hot-box below the howling of the wind and the sharp, cold terror of those gulfs of gray mists!

It is amazing how naturally I have accepted M. Novinsky's serene figure in my world. Glossily booted and impeccable, he was looking up at me from the foot of the stairs when I appeared this morning.

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"*Nul Américaine*," he said, his long gray eyes stirring with a smile, "the road is blocked by a tangle of trains. We may miss the one express that crawls out to Irkutsk. You know Kipling calls us 'the most westernly of Easterns.'"

I felt a sudden access of enthusiasm. "The best drama in the world, I assure you, is a Chinese street quarrel. And an actor once told me that he liked playing these Russian tempers, because they are inexhaustible."

Did Rachel and Bernhardt, I wonder, learn their furies from these boundless, timeless Orientals? For an hour strange words hissed and scratched—expletives purely Slavonic and unintelligible burned off over the wires in every direction. I have no quarrel with a Russian rage; it appeals to me as admirably effective. Behold for us, at least, a result *magnifique!* A war special stands on the siding being caparisoned for a dash across Siberia. One coach, an 1830 engine piled high with wood which is roped on at every conceivable angle, the whole looking like one of those overburdened donkeys one sees along the wall in Peking.

The vista ahead drops away in a vast white

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fog. Down that phantom-white distance the wind is rising, the snow eddies past the windows in plummy white swirls, and with every swirl the unknown there grows fleecier. The General strides up and down the platform, a gaunt figure, his great red-lined cape unfurling behind him like the wings of a monstrous bird, while Cossack orderlies provision the car, their striped trousers moving briskly over the snow. The General brings always the same curious vision before my eyes: armies marching and countermarching, spreading myriad-wise over the plain; the passion of war; millions tramping to their death; the music of the battle-hymns. Certainly through the General courses little of Pushkin's "dove-blood of the Slav"!

Three young officers have come down from the barracks to greet their superior officer and stand about in delightful trepidation. One little captain's wife, who evidently knows her way about the world, arrives armed with roasted *ryabtchiks* and a bottle of Madeira. The car is a first-class car filched from the Russian express, fitted with mahogany and velvet and luxuriously appointed—as the Russians know how to appoint. The General

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stalks through the car, followed by the orderly.

"This half of the car, *Mademoiselle Américaine*," he decrees, with an authoritative wave of his hand, "is your domain—drawing-room, bedroom, room to spare. M. Novinsky and I enter only by your permission. Ivan Caspitch will stow away your bags." And he withdraws in form and with distinction—a masterly retreat.

Ivan Caspitch appears with the Siberian crab-apple maid I have borrowed from the hotel for the sake of *les convenances* until we reach Irkutsk, red-aproned and a bundle under each arm. More officers, more *kvass*, more food, more wood! Katya eyes both the steppe and me with foreboding and crosses herself broadly. It would be difficult to say which she fears most—the steppe or *l'Américaine*.

Ahead lies the dim abyss, filled with a misty whiteness which showers from the sky moment by moment, hour by hour—a strange, uncharted, soundless sea. Ten thousand miles of silence, ten thousand miles of white and tideless ocean! Snow—flying, drifting, swirling snow. The belted *krestyanki* and *izvostchiks* wave as we leave the siding.

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"*Gospode tebye! Gospode tebye!*" shout the hairy giants as we pull slowly out.

"It might be Peary's dash for the Pole or Shackleton's relief," I murmur, as the strange trio of us stand at the window, off for Europe.

"It might be anything thrilling and romantic if it were not for that absurd engine," grants M. Novinsky. "It so resembles a donkey that I cannot believe but that at the last moment it will have to be led into the mystery."

III

BLOTTING THE ESCUTCHEON

WHAT a strange fabric of impressions this journey across Siberia leaves in one's hands! A naked level flowing to the far horizon, white above and gray below, and in that rim between earth and sky something dark that flies and flies before the wind. It is the mystery of all great spaces—of Mongolia—of Egypt. But there is no touch of gold here, no sun, no heat, no shimmering sand, no intense physical mystery. All is dead, misty white; the mystery of *tundra*, of forests and night and death; the mystery which the Russian has written into his literature—of Raskolnikoff, of Orloff and Anna and Vronsky. Silence, space, death—and furious movement. I never shall and never wish to lose the memory of these snow-dunes. For me there is healing in these spaces, release for the fretted prisoner of self, and escape from

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the emphatically individual. It is one with the assurance that the Orient had given me—the peace of the knowledge that life is but episodic, a fragment of cloud scudding across a night sky and soon to be merged with the whole.

The General pores all day over maps and war manuals while M. Novinsky and I explore the world like a pair of Robinson Crusoes. In spite of our importance, we are on a military schedule, and sometimes we sit on the steppe for hours while the Cossacks stretch their legs and walk the sturdy Siberian ponies about in the snow. They are not handsome, these trans-Baikal troops with whom we fraternize while the trains tangle. Sun and wind and rain have reduced them to the monochrome of the steppe until they might almost be said to have protective coloring. They are gaited, too, like Mongols; the gait of men bred to ride, not to walk, and unfamiliar with their legs.

“They do not look particularly fierce,” I observed to M. Novinsky, as we clambered off the train yesterday to cross the tracks.

“No man can look fierce with a loaf of bread under one arm and a pan of milk under

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the other," answered M. Novinsky. "The Czar's special fighting men, nevertheless; they wear the Cossack stripe from cradle to grave—and like their fighting well enough. Of all the troops, they alone can never understand why they should make prisoners. If a man is dead, you can take his boots."

The General strides about like a giant sand-piper, pulling his military mustache. "The hardest troops in Europe," he vows. "Black bread and a bit of straw; it is sufficient. But fools!"

For myself I must confess to a certain strangeness about, that makes our utilitarian civilization pale visibly.

How swiftly Mongolia unrolls at the sight and smell of the ponies! The same wiry beasts I have ridden with a llama for riding master in purple and orange and a silver-pommeled saddle. They are bound around with memories, memories of grazing antelope, of wool-carts high against the sky in a notch of the pass, of wheeling eagles and brown-skinned shepherd boys piping their lays on the hillside.

"A chap like this nearly cost me my life once in Turkestan," M. Novinsky said yesterday,

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looking oddly incongruous against the shagginess of the ponies, rubbing a little palmetto's nose with a neat dogskin glove. "I had been sent on a mission to Kashgar; seven days over granite mountains, and then the plateau. I got some devil's sort of fever that made it necessary to get to the doctor. One of the Cossack ponies fell sick, too. 'Find another horse and we will push on,' I ordered the next morning. Do you think that beggar Cossack would leave his horse? Not he. He expected a flogging, that is certain. He was exactly like the quaking lad in Kuprin's story—do you remember? 'At your service, your High Excellency,' he would say, touching his cap a hundred times a day. But would he leave that beast? He would *not*. And—well—I couldn't order him flogged! And so his Majesty, the Czar of all the Russias, in the person of me, waited three days in a Kirghiz tent, with mosquitoes and flies holding *festa*. There were compensations, I admit. The whole village turned out to amuse me—dancing and theatricals every night before my tent. I might have been the Pasha himself. But that's another story."

"And your fever?"

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"My fever? The pony entirely recovered—and I, too, in the end," he added with a smile. "*Shto dyelatch?* Loyalty is the first principle of life. A Chinese to his ancestors; a woman to her heart; a Cossack to his horse. I liked the rascal for it, and when I came back to Peking I brought him with me. He was the most faithful servant I ever had."

Sometimes we explore the stations for food. If I did not know by a hundred other proofs, I should be convinced now that M. Novinsky is a gentleman from the cheerfulness with which he blots the future ambassadorial escutcheon by eating *shchee*, greasy cabbage soup, at long tables in company with peasants and *izvostchiks*, to humor my whim.

"You see," I explained to-day, looking about the murky station dining-room for a means to vindicate my taste, and wondering what Russian etiquette demanded one should do with a slice of meat and an egg which my spoon had fished from the bottom of my soup, "you see, they are all old friends of mine, from Gorky and Tolstoi and Dostoevski and all the rest. Ten years I have known them, but I never had a samovar with them or *smelled* them before. You know, that one

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over there at the end of the table is Turgenev's Ermolai—you remember, with the dogs. And that lazy one is Vankya on Levin's estate—he went to sleep in the hay. Don't you recognize him? Look at the way they fall upon their food and devour it. I have seen boatmen on a Chinese junk eat like that when they have been poling for days against the wind until they snarled and screamed like beasts with the effort. It's not our way—it's hunger—”

“Yes, it's hunger—red hunger,” rejoined M. Novinsky, “but, *Mademoiselle Américaine*, don't imagine they are not old friends to me!” he added, earnestly. “My grandfather owned several thousand of them and my mother still holds a sort of matriarchy down on her estate in Tver. They come to her for everything—food, medicine, justice. It's rather nice to see her holding court among them. . . . Old friends! *Nu*, they are such old friends as you in your shifting America cannot comprehend. My boyhood memories are all bound up with them; fishing with Petya, dragging out in the early morning and walking off my legs in the marshes for grouse, fighting forest fires with the foresters until I was blacked and blistered,

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without eyelashes, and ordered off to the great house. And lazy summer days, lying on my back under the limes, while old Agatha, the housekeeper, jingled her keys among the storehouses and smuggled me gooseberry tarts, which I, being delicate, was forbidden. *Nu*, they are friends of generations. It was one thing that made the old landlord decent—the responsibility of them. What to do with them now, there's the rub. They are farther down the scale than the Chinese peasant, of an ignorance that you cannot imagine; uncouth, canny, but superstitious and filled with dark mystical and political passions. The *intelligentsia* have fought back and forth across them until now the whole land is sullen and distrustful. And why not? To move them, that is not impossible. But to determine their direction and momentum—ah! With the first touch of freedom they are dangerous and impractical—the *malaise* of too long thwarting.”

“There is something here that I never felt even in the far regions of China,” I ventured, after a pause. “It is to descend into the earth as it was in the beginning.”

“That is Russia,” said M. Novinsky, with

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his eyes on the melancholy horizon. "The earth as it was in the beginning."

The mates of these men we often see selling milk and game at the stations, the wind whipping their skirts, broad-hipped, broad-cheeked creatures, eyes shadowed with an indefatigable sadness. I watch them for hours and M. Novinsky often joins me. Yesterday the three of us stood at the window looking at two huge artichokes of shawls supported by felt boots, coquetting with the *izvostchiks* after the manner of young bears. Between these uncouth figures and M. Novinsky I feel a certain something in common, but the General is different.

"Bah!" he scowled. "The most wrinkled old crone in China tosses off a street scene with more relish than these peasants. An Italian, a Burmese, a Chinese—yes, but these Russians have no zest for life."

"Plain, endless winter, gray sky, does not make for *esprit*," commented M. Novinsky, calmly, without lifting his eyes to the General. "No mountains, no sea; the rivers are the only romance they have except such as they find in their own souls. To understand the Russian is to remember that the Russian

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word for beauty is *red*. Read the Russian geographically; and that means to see him against the background of an endless gray monotony. My conviction is that he drinks and kills only because he is bored."

"But these are the brawny figures that pour tides of men toward Europe," I ventured, looking up at the autocratic face of the General.

"*Da Slavu Bogu!* They breed as fecundly as Mother Earth herself. Their *raison d'être*. And now that the men are gone, they must bring forth bread as they have brought forth men."

"Men and bread—bread and men." The words wearied my imagination. I felt myself sinking slowly to the earth under some monstrous burden.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mademoiselle. It's their lot. A *muzhik* who needs a *baba* for harvest, I assure you, loses little time in courting. They are used to it." And the General turned away from the window.

I regard the General and M. Novinsky and then I look at these *babas* outside in the snow. Again I am struck with incredulity. Are they of the same race? M. Novinsky is finely mod-

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eled; face narrow, eyes with more than a tinge of Eastern inscrutability, skin fine in texture, fingers nervously intelligent. In the canine world he would be a *borzoi*. The cigarette-case he has just laid down is shagreen because he likes the feel, and stamped with a tiny monogram in gold. A piece of peach-blow or *sang de bœuf* he handles as if he were worshiping. He has a passion for French novels. The story he told me yesterday of a Japanese girl near whom he stood for morning ablutions at an inn in Tokio was related with the subtlety of a Frenchman and the *naïveté* of an Italian, and probably no one but a Russian could have given it point in so many different languages. The flower of an extremely sophisticated civilization, superficially everything that the peasant is not, he is. Russia with all her sullen monotonies offers the most brutal of contrasts. And yet, between M. Novinsky and the *muzhiks* I feel an indefinable something in common; perhaps only a simplicity.

The General is more baffling. Dinner we always have at night in his compartment. There are cavaire and soup, with fish and olives and Siberian game. Ivan Caspitch places

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two bundles on the table, between which the decorations of the General's uniform gleam like the jewels of the Mother of God. The effect is somber but rich and Russian. I like to watch the shadows play across the General's face, his eyes darkening, his gaunt body relaxed against the cushions, his fingers dexterously rolling a cigarette, speaking English rapidly, brilliantly and with more distinction than an Englishman. One forgets the indifference of the steppe, the darkness closing down like a cowl. He is interested in American women—he says they sip the honey from the flowers of the world—a man for whom, I am certain, life has run swift and deep. Twice when I have discussed a man, he has dismissed him with a shrug and the final damnation, "He knows nothing of life." Always he seems quaffing greedily at life before some cold finality overwhelms him. I wonder sometimes if he fears to meet his death. Yesterday, when he had been moodily watching the steppe, he turned away. "The dark door," he said, and to-day again almost with superstition. What life means for him I do not know; not what it means to me nor, perhaps, to M. Novinsky, smoking

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quietly in the corner, and watching him with enigmatic eyes.

M. Novinsky, I am beginning to suspect, holds the General in distrust. He is of too excellent technique to disclose it, and perhaps it would never have penetrated my consciousness had it not been for a sudden flaring-up to-day, after a discussion with the General.

"Half-breed!" M. Novinsky exclaimed, contemptuously, picking up a volume of Ferrier, when the General had retired to smoke.

As a matter of fact, the General does confess to Teutonic blood; he has told me himself, with a certain arrogant pride, that he came from Riga. Perhaps this explains much that has been puzzling me: a ruthless indifference to the peasants, and an autocracy, certainly not of the Russians Russian. The strands of the Russian loom are beginning to separate. Is the General that type of German bureaucrat who has denied freedom to the most innately democratic people in the world?

"And are these Baltic-Germans to officer the war?" I murmur, half to myself, looking at M. Novinsky, who continues to gaze at the far gray horizon.

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M. Novinsky is recovering from a long illness and is disqualified for military service, but I hazard that something other than a fling at the capital hurries this slim, keen Slavophil toward Europe.

IV

CHRISTMAS ON THE STEPPE

CHRISTMAS in Siberia! That is, of course, for a vagabond American. Russian Christmas lies thirteen days ahead. It is a Christmas which, I dare say, when I am old I shall count an illusion. Even now it seems a flying chimera. At least we are on what one without a yellow-journalist conscience might term a dash. The demand for the General at the front has cleared the tangle, and all the trains of horses and ammunition, sections of gray-coated Cossacks and of Austrian prisoners bound for the Siberian salt-mines, have been drawn up on sidings, while our little special rushes past like Thompson's Hound of Heaven. All day yesterday the track lay along Lake Baikal, that fragment of sea imprisoned here by some strange chance in centuries past, tossing yesterday in a black rage. Even the General,

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who pores all day over maps, laid down his papers, and the strange three of us—with Ivan Caspitch and Katya at the other window—stood watching the weird scene. M. Novinsky, sensitive to all beauty, I could feel ravaged by its splendor.

"It is a Tam o'Shanter race," I ventured.

"For which Beardsley drew the setting."

M. Novinsky completed the fancy.

The wind crumpling and crashing down from the Arctic was so high that one could scarcely stand between the cars, and the lake roared like a beast. But beyond the black waters the sun touched the mountains with a dazzling whiteness.

"A new vision vouchsafed by the prophets, a city celestial let down into the world!" M. Novinsky murmured, watching the glory with mystic eyes.

As night fell the mystery of the lake deepened. Lighted headlands jutted out into the waters and the whole took on a new profundity, surcharged with the savagery of night and the North. I fell asleep at the window, still watching while darkness covered the face of the waters. When I awoke it was two o'clock, Christmas morning in the West.

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The General stood in my doorway looking, to my sleepy gaze, like a fur-clad angel; outside lights were foregathering.

"Irkutsk, Mademoiselle. The express waits!"

I shall always treasure that sally. It was the General's one bit of humor.

The thrilling delicacy of that early morning in the North! I looked up at my tall Russians. M. Novinsky was breathing the air of home; his long gray-blue eyes shone with a nervous excitement. The General showed less emotion. Through a silvery snow tissue the lights of the big white station gleamed with the festive air of an enchanted castle. With its silvery blues and grays, its ethereal other-worldliness, it might have been a scene from Maeterlinck, incredibly lovely.

The General and M. Novinsky saw to a ticket and a place in the post-train toward Harbin for Katya, a little dazed but mainly stolid, whose going wrung a tear from a Cos-sack's eye, and then we wandered inside the station. M. Novinsky and I sat down under the dusty artificial palms to drink black coffee from tall glasses, while the General found acquaintance among the sworded and booted

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officers with whose greens, blues and crimsons the crowd was irradiated. A strange Christmas!

After the wintry solitudes of the plain the interior of the station seemed almost gay, but it was a delusive gaiety, which betokened the infection of humanity. Plainly we had left the steppe. For some reason, difficult to define, it was less Siberian and more Russian. The General and M. Novinsky, too, seemed more Russian than in Peking, as if in mingling with their own race they had acquired a new access of nationality. On the whole, the officers were well-set-up looking men and somehow one felt one's self nearing a mighty vortex. The hosts were gathering; strange ethnological types such as I had never seen before; foreshortened faces with copper skins; tall hawk-nosed men, long-skirted and green-girdled; sleeping *muzhik* faces under close caps—all sucked and dragged by cosmic forces there beyond their world, neither of their willing nor their ken. It is interesting to watch one's imagination struggle upward. I can almost put my finger on the moment when the realization of Great Russia moved into a large upper chamber of my imagination.

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It was there in the station at Irkutsk, and it came in one clear moment like a vision, as if I had really sat on the rim of the sun with Uriel from the beginning of the world. I saw a white level sweeping from the Pacific to the Urals and rushing then from the Urals to Western Europe, spreading north to the Arctic Circle and melting to the south under the blue skies of Crimea—cool crystal spaces greater than the surfaces of the moon which watched over our voyagings. Across the wan surfaces drifted saffron horsemen out of the East, yellow clouds crossing the face of the earth—a tide that ebbed and flowed, advanced and retreated—receded to the East and there for centuries rested. And now again the cycle begins—again a yellow tide flows toward Europe; variegated races, aliens among themselves, eying one another strangely, forsaking their tents, their *izbas*, the dreams of their youth, the work of their hands, now—ten centuries later—to gather under one standard, to fight under one command—of the Great White Czar. “Not a nation, but a world.” I dimly comprehended. I went to sleep dreaming of chill surfaces of the moon across which rayed shadowy variegated figures,

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streaming in a mighty flood toward a giant mill-race—somewhere—there—beyond.

A grotesque Christmas! I awoke in the express, the sun shining and the whole landscape looking like a monster Christmas card, silvered and frosted and ready to mail. There through the world, in London and New York, Christmas chimes were ringing. Packages were being untied and gay little notes opened, and children were pulling toys out of their stockings. I looked out at the monotony of the steppe, at a row of birches fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

But there was one bit of holiday. A plum-pudding had been thrust into the car by a kind English friend the last moment in Peking. From Chinese train to Japanese, from the Japanese train to the post—bad 'cess to it—from the post to the special, from the special to the express, we attended that pudding—his Excellency the General, M. Novinsky and I. The Russians had never tasted English plum-pudding and I was eager that this should be irresistible. My first mission this morning was to consult the chef. "Like so many other things Russian," the General

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assured me, "he will not be Russian at all, but French." And French he was, smilingly, piquantly French, as incongruous as a Paris hat in the Siberian steppe. With a flashing smile, which had lost none of its French *savoir faire* in the wilderness, he promised me that his sauce would make other puddings taste like brown paper. It did. I knew that it was a triumph the minute I saw the General's face. Under the new law there was no champagne, but the Russians ate to Christmas liberally.

"To America!" The General commanded the table like a swarthy ikon.

"To Russia!" offered M. Novinsky, cosmopolitan, *élégant*.

"To the Entente!" I proposed, clutching at the side of the rocking train.

"To an English plum-pudding made by a Chinese cook, sauced by a French chef, served by a Tartar on a rocking trans-Siberian train," M. Novinsky rose again to the delight of all the enormously dining guests, smiling at us across the red table-cloths in the murky little car, "and British to the end!" What an infinitesimal point of gaiety we were in that somber brooding!

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The Russian express is not so luxuriously appointed as the Wagon Lits, but I should not hesitate to commend it to a traveler. In fact, to me it is depressingly comfortable—but my standards are a vagabond's. No more scurrying off the train; no more soup from which one may fish a whole course dinner, *sans* sweets and cigarettes, eaten with red-bearded giants who might pray to their own images for those of the saints; no more candle-lighted dinners *à trois*, with the darkness tipped over one like a bowl. No more ministrations of Ivan Caspitch. The salt would have lost its savor indeed did not a new interest appear over the horizon, numerous troop-trains carrying Austrian and German prisoners.

Our train halts frequently and we cross the tracks to talk to these "tattered creatures who were once men." The rank and file of them are different from our friends, the Cossacks; a trifle more sophisticated, a little less aloof, more quickly given to an intimate—a too intimate—smile than the Cossacks. Their clothing is thin for Siberian winds. I saw one man yesterday leaning out of a box-car window with only a vest and no shirt, but he looked so cheerful that I wondered if it

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were from choice and not compulsion. They swarm to the windows and doors of the box-cars where they are packed like traditional herrings, with as keen interest in what may be forthcoming from our side as we have in theirs. They even board our train and straggle through the cars—unkempt gray men with gold-exploring eyes, begging always the same thing, always and without variation, cigarettes. *Papirossi* will be as thoroughly embedded in the vocabulary of the German as coffee was rooted in the palate of the Viennese after the Napoleonic wars. It is only the men who thus fraternize. The officers are a handsome, scowling lot, who seem always to look beyond, into the heart of the Tyrol.

"Where were they taken?" I asked the General yesterday, of an uncouth band who were fighting to get within the range of my camera.

"I never ask," the General answered, with pointed brevity. I had blundered in the soldiers' world, indelicately.

"There are no guides in evidence. They wander about at will?"

"The steppe itself is a guide that never sleeps," stated the General. And I knew

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that he spoke grimly true. Any invasion of that white sanctity spells swift and inexorable death.

Sometimes the wind moans across the waste until I cannot sleep, but high above the wind and the rush of the train come the fragments of a song—in a flash our express has passed and gone—but the memory lingers. Whatever else slips through memory's net, never will it be those snatches of song heard on the steppe in the watches of the night—the melody of men crossing the void to keep their tryst with death.

V

CHILDREN OF THE FOREST

EVEN a fine style may grow monotonous, and the steppe is akin to *le grand style*. For days, more than ten now, my eyes have implored the plain for an elevation, even the slightest aspiring point in the level, but the only answer has been—more level. This morning Ivan Caspitch awoke me at five to behold the Urals, the cæsura between Europe and Asia. If seas flow between the Wests, what a mighty break should yawn here between the West and the East! Together we stood at the window, scanning the hollow gray light, Ivan Caspitch stolid and bulky in the half-light and I shivering in my *shuba*, straining my eyes for the pause between two continents.

“Where are they, Ivan?” I demanded. “I cannot see them.” My acquaintance with the Urals had been mainly with *lapis lazuli*

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in the jewelers' windows, but I should have been content with the earthiest earth had it been mountains. But for all my vigilance, there was only a placid flowing.

"There, *barishnya*." Ivan Caspitch pointed to a darker scattering of forest swelling slightly to the left and right. "There, we are crossing them now. *Bozhe moi! bolshoi vyeter!*"

"*Bolshoi vyeter!*" Indeed it was, a great wind. To that I agreed. It shrieked like fiends from the Deserts of Nowhere, though I had not known how to say it in Russian. But mountains! No mountains, only a barely perceptible flaring up and then quickly dying down into lethargy. How like life is the steppe, without plan, prologue, chapters, or theme!

"The Urals," Ivan Caspitch affirmed, briefly.

I looked at Ivan Caspitch as he stood in the early morning darkness, broadly blocked, neutral in color, without a single incisive feature; the product and the symbol of that somber, implacable, infinite heath.

"Ivan," I cried, "it is terrible! Do you never fear and hate it—the steppe?"

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"*Nu, barishnya*, we are used to it." Ivan Caspitch shrugged his shoulders stolidly.

The background is always the same, but against its white monotone is imprinted a various design. The last few days the pattern has changed noticeably from the new of Siberia to the old of Russia. We have left the pencil sketches of the birches and now we are among the somber oils of the deep forest. There are more villages now and more frequently the spires and domes of Russian churches seen dimly through the flying snow. More often little log huts, *izbas*, edge their way out of the forest and blink at the world like curious owls; and the peasant himself comes out also to blink at the world or moves along the clearing—but another fruit of the forest, like mushrooms and the lichens among which he grows. Assuredly this is different. Siberia I felt young, vigorous, the pioneer. But Russia I feel old and weary, the melancholy and mellow. Russia, the mother.

What people emerge so simply from the black earth and ascend so simply to God? Few comprehend these children of the forest as does Stephen Graham. Read the chapter

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on the "Age of Wood" in his *Undiscovered Russia*.

The *muzhik's* cradle is a pine hole, scooped out like an ancient boat. It hangs with hempen ropes from a springy sapling in his mother's cottage. His coffin is but a larger cradle, a larger, longer pine scooped out, with an ax-hewn plank to cover it, and wooden pegs to nail it down; and between the cradle and the coffin he lives, surrounded by wood. A robust baby, he clambers out of his cradle onto a pine floor, also of grand ax-hewn planks, too solid to wear into holes like other men's poor floors. He crawls about until he learns to run from one hand-carved chair to another, and at last takes his seat at the table his father made a month before the wedding. He crosses himself to the sacred symbols made on birch bark. He eats all his meals with a wooden spoon; forks and knives are almost unknown in the forest. He eats off wooden plates or out of wooden Russian basins. Even the salt-cellar is from the forest and was plaited by his sister from reeds last year. He gets big enough to go out to the forest with his brothers and sisters, and they take birch-bark baskets and gather mushrooms or *yagodi*—all forest fruits are called *yagodi*, berries. Vania they call him—little Vania—Vaska when he looks like a dirty little urchin. See him every day in muddy little bare legs, hunting in the forest for berries or chasing the cows who have gone astray there. He learns to walk nimbly on the uneven, moss-covered ground, and can even run among the broken branches and thorns and leap from one dead tree to another or swarm up the straight gray-green trunks. He learns to trap rabbits

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and to catch young woodcocks, knows the wolf paw, the fox paw, the bear paw, in the soft soil. The priest teaches him a little in the school about God and the Czar and observances of the Church, and such education suffices for Vania. He is becoming a woodsman. The forest is the best school, but he never remembers how it was he learned there. He came to know that when the sun set it was evening, and when it rose it was morning. He learned that the foliage of a tree takes shape according to the sunshine it gets and the time of day the sunshine reaches it, and when he is in the dark forest he knows by the shape of a trunk the way out. Every tree is a compass in itself. But so deep and subconscious is his knowledge that he does not look at the tree at all. He does not know how he knows. Ask him the way out of a wood and he will point in this direction or that, as the case may be. But he will not be able to tell you how he knew.

As I said, the forests are behind his eyes as well as in front of them. The forests look into the simple soul, placid as a lake, and draw their own pictures there.

The time comes for Vania to marry, and he had better build himself an *izba*. It is of pine, and three friends help him to build it, while his father stands by and directs. They have no planes and chisels, saws, squares, joiner's tables, and the like. All is wrought by ax and every joint is ax-cut and every smooth surface is ax-hewn. The walls of the house and of the great stove are paneled. Vania hews out a sleeping-shelf for himself and his wife above the oven. He makes unbreakable chairs to sit on and make merry, and a table, and finally, without other tool than his ax, builds a cart to take himself and his bride from the

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church, and he builds the shafts and the Russian collar arch to which the horse is yoked—all of wood; even the wheels are not faced with iron, and the harness is made of wood and leather.

One night great-grandfather Vania—that is, the father of Vania's father—comes into the new house and prays to God. Then he tells them that his time is passing. He is an old man. To-morrow he will take a new log and build a coffin for himself, and he will cut a wooden cross to put over his grave. Grandfather Vania makes his coffin and puts it away until it may be necessary. Meanwhile it may hold rye meal, or, if there is little space in the old home, he can make a bed in it and sleep in it o' nights. The time will come when he will rest there all night and not rise the next morning. Old Grandfather Vania will be dead. Vania's father and Vania and other villagers will carry the coffin out to the grave, and the old man's body will be committed to the ancient pine mold.

Then Vania's father, himself a grandfather, follows in the steps of man down to the grave, and Vania ripens to his prime and little Vania grows up and marries. All among the standing trees. Little Vania has a child and the whole of human life turns round a quarter-circle. So on, *da capo*.

There were ten of us when the express left Irkutsk: a Siberian mine-owner and his wife, so rich that one talked about them in whispers; a bearded engineer from the Amur; the Spanish-eyed, little Russian wife of an officer; a baby who wailed with true Russian pessi-

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mism; an old *nyanya*, voluminously clothed in a white apron and coif, and equally enveloped in folk-lore and superstition; and a *café chantant* singer from Vladivostok, black-eyed, crisply curled, and swathed in velvet and furs after the manner of the divine Sarah. But Russia has been populating her plains longer than Siberia, and we are picking up travelers. At Cheliabinsk there were several passengers for the second-class and a Polish woman appeared in the first-class, with whom I must share my luxurious compartment. And to-day Gogol's Taras Bulba himself came aboard!

Most of the jollity of the car is shut up in the compartment of the Siberian mine-owner—a thick-bodied, red-lipped man whom I do not like—and his wife, with both of whom the General has made friends. M. Novinsky knits his eyebrows and evidently he thinks his own thoughts. Nevertheless, we both sometimes join the group. It is difficult to resist Madame at tea-time, when the samovar is set. And perhaps now I have peeped through another window into the General's soul. *Cherchez la femme*, always, with a Russian. Madame is a startling, fascinating

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woman—even among Russians, where one finds color and fire. She is a type of the south, from the vineyards and sunny hills of Little Russia. Wide plains and the gray skies could never have bred her—so warm and lazy and luxuriant, hair so auburn, eyes a sapphire blue that bring constantly to mind Crimean seascapes, and her laugh deep-throated and rich.

If I were a man I should pray to be delivered from temptation—and take the next train!

Russian women are a bit unconventional—shall I say?—in their dress. Both Madame and the *café chantant* singer wear dressing-gowns all day long. Both dine in their compartments, served by a battalion of waiters and small boys, carrying all the dishes of a course dinner through three cars. Madame's robe is a zebra stripe such as Bakst would hang on an Egyptian dancer, though Madame's figure is not that of an Egyptian; it is in this robe that she dispenses a lavish tea every afternoon. Heaven and the chef only know where the dainties come from; it is tea here on the plain as if we were in the Plaza: Russian sweetmeats, caviare, nuts and

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jam, *pâté de fois gras*, and hothouse grapes. One is expected not to eat and drink, but to eat and drink more. If the Indian's accusation against the white man, that he plays with his mouth, be true, the Russian is the arch-criminal.

Every one speaks Russian, of course, hissing, purling Russian, Madame's voice dominating, as does her personality. I cannot understand always, but I know that her language, usually cultured, sometimes slips into the voice and accent of a country *baba*. Yesterday M. Novinsky glanced at me quickly to see if I had understood. Madame followed his glance.

"Monsieur Galahad!" she smiled, mockingly.

If one crossed her! But then one does not! Man is her game and him she hunts with a splendid savagery that makes an Englishwoman seem a cold, neuter creature beside this Malva of Gorky.

The rôle of the *café chantant* singer is deep seclusion. The Little Russian coquettes, but even her Spanish eyes are ineffectual, pitted against *la belle sauvage*. It is the bridge-builder who most torments me with the re-

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minder of scenes his eyes have traveled over and mine can never behold. But I can never talk with him; he is dedicated to *la belle sauvage*. Curiously enough, the most persistent face is the servant of the Siberian mine-owner whom I see walking outside in the snow, a bearded man with smoky-blue eyes and a peculiarly well co-ordinated carriage.

"Extraordinary type for a servant," I remarked to the General yesterday, watching the fine stride, certainly not that of the class to which he belongs.

"A lumpish fellow when one speaks to him," returned the General, glaring moodily out of the window.

Has my reading of human nature gone so far awry, or is he other than he seems? But why should the General—? It is puzzling.

Yesterday I stumbled on a treasure. It came through the cracked piano which makes the journey to and fro across Siberia in the dining-car. I was improvising accompaniments to negro melodies, which M. Novinsky had found charming, one gray day when the darkness closed down early. Suddenly I felt another presence and I turned around to see a

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crooked, stocky figure at the other end of the car, our waiter, his eyes blue, his face shining with joy.

"*Barina, Tartarski ya*," he said, proudly, approaching with a napkin on his arm. "I am Tartar! *Ya lublu mysiky. Ya tantzyu*. I love music. I dance." He threw out his arms with an indescribable gesture of forgotten freedom.

Shades of Genghis Khan! The son and heir of those vigorous hordes that overran the world from Peking to Budapest, and from the northern steppe to India—this mild-eyed creature, with shoulders bent, respectfully waiting, a napkin on his arm! But if there be any Tartar blood in his veins, it leaps up with the music. I never play but that he tells me that he is not *Russki*, but *Tartarski*. Then he squares his shoulders, clears the table, and marshals the crumbs off with the air of the conqueror.

This is the sixteenth day since we went out from the walls and towers of Peking. Every one agrees that the journey is *skuchno*. The train rocks abominably. I think I shall never get it out of my brain. *La Polskaya* has lessened the space in my compartment,

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but also my ennui! She is excellent for my Russian, too, since she speaks no English. And for me, there is the joy of pursuing strange impressions and penetrating farther into strange lands.

La Polskaya is not a beauty. I should say that nature is decidedly in arrears with her. In fact, she represents about every feature of Slavic plainness—dingy skin, broad figure and face, and apathetic expression. If it were not for her eyes—but she has kind, redeeming Russian eyes. By day she reads Maeterlinck's *Death* and smokes. By night she wears gloves and continues to smoke. And that reminds me that, in spite of her declaration that nothing matters after forty, La Polskaya has a weakness. Yesterday she gravely produced two bottles of hair tonic for my opinion. She had spent thirty dollars in Harbin, she told me, for cosmetics and lotions, and felt grieved that I could not guarantee results. I consoled her by promising her my cold-cream from America, out of gratitude for which she has given me a box of French powder. Now that we have exchanged feminine civilities, she says that she was born and bred in Warsaw, though I

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should have guessed her a product of an outpost of civilization.

My disrobing at night receives an embarrassing concentration of interest, but her curiosity is so naïve and her enjoyment so sincere that I cannot show annoyance. Every detail of dress, every movement of my toilet, is honored with an individual attention which in no whit diminishes with repetition. In fact, La Polskaya quite settles down to the half-hour. Only once, in the Rockies, have I come upon anything like this, when a wee girl, deserted by her mother in a cattle-camp, used to ride her pony up our trail with the sunrise, tuck herself away in a corner of the cabin, and sit silent as the Sphinx the whole golden day, fathoms deep in content at the mere sight of a woman. We laugh a good deal, and then when I am safely tucked away La Polskaya lights a cigarette, with a sigh of satisfaction, declares I am a child—what is in her mind I don't know—puts on her gloves, and lights another cigarette. The last thing at night I am aware of is the aroma of her cigarette, and it is my alarm in the morning.

Yesterday I dressed and went into the din-

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ing-car early, and there, with a samovar before him, I found Taras Bulba. He must have walked in from the steppe in seven-league boots. I had been counting some of the other belted men we saw as giants, but he dwarfed them all—a stature possible to be conceived, it would seem, only at some earlier, lustier period. His head was a viking's head and crowned with heavy hair, which, I fancy, could rumple mightily in his berserker rages. As I entered he lifted his eyes in one powerful glance, and then apparently consigned me to oblivion while he pursued his cakes and tea. It was distressingly incongruous to see him eat cakes and tea; it ought to have been meat torn in shreds and wassail out of one of those up-curving Russian beakers. I wanted to call to him to stand up and swing a battle-ax instead of a teaspoon, but it was only a teaspoon. When he rolled his way into the car, I followed timidly after. Verily, the lion and the mouse. I know no nation in which I feel a giant's power—physically and mentally—as I do in the Russian.

There is a stronger feel of civilization in the air now, and more spurred and booted officers are joining the train. To-morrow, if all goes

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well, the train-master announces that we shall be in Petrograd; all the home-going Russians have been telegraphing the news of their imminent arrival. It wraps me with a realization of how far there through the earth lies America. We must always fly thus, it seems—perhaps into eternity—so many days have we fled in this narrow space between earth and sky. Perhaps I should be content if it were so, for I am “used to it.” And to-day I feel a waif standing before strange gates. Here are friends. There—who can say?

Who ever enters an unknown land without a sense of mystery both alluring and repelling? There on the plain, somewhere in the dimness, lies a city whose existence has drawn me seventeen days across this desert whiteness—a city I have not seen, whose streets I shall wander, roofs that will lodge me, sky and snow and river that will be mine, friends and tides of influence—a whole new world of thought and feeling—perhaps change—which in my natural world would never have been. How dare we boldly evoke these unfamiliar worlds for ourselves out of the void, forsaking our own paths to explore their mysterious ways!

PART II

VI

PETER'S CAPITAL

PETROGRAD! No land "east of the sun and west of the moon," as I had feared, but true! That is, I *feel* a city there, though my eyes are still baffled by the curtain of darkness which has not as yet lifted. It is morning, eight by the French clock on the wall, but there is not the least rift in the gloom, only a sense of something strange outlying there—a trampling of boots, men pouring endlessly through the streets, and a rumbling of guns. They are shifting troops. I hear a hoarse song and a sharp *ura*. How different, how exceedingly different this turbulence from the peace of the East, the solitary heart of the whiteness from which we have come!

We were nearly the whole of the night finding this miracle of the marshes. Eleven came, twelve, one. The gaiety that had sprung up like a breeze at the announcement of our ar-

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rival died down. The General was wrapped in his own thoughts and M. Novinsky smoked, moodily silent, and I felt a strange homesickness, not for place, but for spiritual kindred. The General is still an enigma, but M. Novinsky has become a charming friend and companion. Yesterday he was not; to-day he is; to-morrow he will cease to be. How strange it all is!

Clouds were crossing the face of the moon, shaping, reshaping, merging again. The wings of the Angel of Wrath beat past us as we fled down the Valleys of Time, and only a miracle, it seemed, could save us or discover a city, other than mirage, in that wild incandescence. But at three the sky was illumined in the west as if by a huge candle, as the train flew on and the flare brightened and resolved itself into myriads of points scattering on the flame. They were the first lights of "Peter's window toward Europe." The trans-steppe journey was finished. At four the train discharged its burden of Asio-European travelers into the echoing Alexander III. station. It seemed the portentous arrival of ocean travelers rather than that of a train. Every one met welcoming

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faces, which, translated into Russian, means *arms*.

That is, every one met welcome except one *Américaine*, and I took refuge among the luggage and stared at the feather-bed *izvostchiks* tied about the middle with rainbow sashes. The General was engulfed in the embrace of two tall sons, and M. Novinsky had vanished behind an astrakhan coat and cap. The sight of women embracing publicly always embarrasses me a trifle, and as for men, I have considered it a good reason for not being Continental. Perhaps, to speak the truth, I had a touch of three-in-the-morning forlornity. But the absence of welcome meant no lack of warm farewell. La Polskaya wept Slavonically on my shoulder. "*Moya milaya*," she wailed. For the moment she was parting with a friend of a lifetime. The General clicked his heels together in military fashion and waived my expressions of gratitude with a French compliment.

"Shall we meet again, Mademoiselle? Ah, it is on the laps of the gods. *Proshchaiete*. Forgive my sins. I leave to-morrow for the front." He kissed my hand; I wished it had been a white, perfumed hand, such as I am

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certain the General loves. A stiff bow to M. Novinsky and then, the luggage having been collected and laded on the leather-aproned saints, M. Novinsky and his brother led the way through the echoing station to the dark bundles of fur outside, stowed me in a swaying shell, and we clattered off down the "main street of All the Russias."

How Russian M. Novinsky and his brother looked in their Russian setting, pouring forth a stream of language on each other; this brother who comes for one day's leave from the Grand Duke's staff and returns immediately to the front. Most of the talk was French, but the ejaculations were Russian. I was too occupied with the square velvet sofa-cushion hat of the *izvostchik*, too agitated with the street, which I found to be the Nevsky, and the signs, which I discovered I could read, to heed the conversation. A river of street here, a continent of square there, bulky geologic strata of houses.

"And how do you *feel* it?" M. Novinsky's brother asked, with a smile like Dmitri Nikolaivitch's, as we turned into the shadow of an immense cathedral that somehow wafted back the memory of Egypt and the temples on the Nile.

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"If Japan is a miniature, Russia was done by a scene-painter," I hazarded.

"Quite true," he laughed, showing his white teeth. "Nothing is small in Russia, not even the virtues or the vices."

"And least of all the cobblestones and the darkness," I could have added. "Or the loneliness." I could have wept on M. Novinsky's elegant and unaware shoulder.

M. Novinsky and the General had debated all the way across the steppe as to which hotel to commit me to, and the decision had finally fallen on the Angleterre as the dullest hotel in Petrograd. I understood when I saw it. But for the boy with peacock feathers in his cap and a red *rubashka*, the general assurance of Russian literature, I should have resigned myself to an English Sunday pall. A whiskered *portier* has assigned me to this room, and here I have been deposited by a green-baize apron and sit in the glow of a porcelain stove.

Black-earth Russia, armed Russia, Holy Russia, potential Russia, Russia the bread-giver of nations—all lie out there in the void. I wish the bread-giver would vouchsafe me a morsel. There is not even a crumb, and I

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am famished. The darkness is Stygian; one might loop it up, but it would always tumble down, immense and suffocating. The last familiar letter of my alphabet has vanished; everything is written in Cyrillic letters and punctuated with bearded Scythians. I wonder could even the angel Uriel say why I rocked seventeen days across Siberia!

The curtain has lifted! But not on the "gayest capital in Europe," not while there is still a trail to Vienna and Budapest, and even blithe old London in May! Oh, for the purple skies of Egypt, or the black and gold of Nikko, or the cherry blossoms of Myanoshita, to waft away the memory of this dun city on a swamp! Monotony on the steppe is acceptable; it comes to have the assurance of a great, buoyant friendship, but by what right has a capital to be written in gray? Twilight skies, trailing mists, a melancholy folk emerging oddly as in a dream, muffled silence. Small wonder that Peter must needs flog his subjects into leaving belfried Moscow for this!

The braziers blaze up, giant tiger-lilies against the snow. The blue poison mists, which the swamp exhales to veil the banalities of the street, offer their own peculiar welcome

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to foreigners, and I am the victim of one of the newly-arrived-in-Russia influenzas. It leaves me of a mind with the American attaché who despatched a fierce diatribe to the State Department, to the effect that children could not live in Petrograd—he himself being fifty and a bachelor—and took the first boat for America. For myself, I could happily yield up my ghost at the foot of an ikon and leave my aching bones under a broad Russian cross in a quiet old nunnery yard. And this is the land that brings the devotional look to M. Novinsky's eyes, eyes that still remember sunny Vevey, Florence, and the Seine! "Something poignant"—yes, perhaps. I can dimly sense it. The Slav to his East, but I will have mine, junk sails and pagodas.

The *portier* and the peacock boy and my waiter are kind, and I am not the object of more staring than a woman not yet decrepit may expect if she travels alone on the Continent. I have always given the palm for real annoyance to a Frenchman, but yesterday I was ready to yield it to the Slav. But for M. Novinsky, I should believe half of what I read of these veneered Tartars. It was in the

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reading-room that the staring began, quiet and unobtrusive. I retreated to the drawing-room, again to be stared at politely but intermittently until I fled. By a quick detour I reached the door, but there I was a prisoner while for two hours a steady tramping continued before my door. To-day, again, the assiduous stare. I fled—this time to the manager.

“Forgive him,” said the manager, “he is an ill-mannered person.” Forgive him! *Kak Rysski*—that manager!

Already I ache with the violence of Russian contrasts. Is not this the land whose women Tolstoi and Turgenev portray? Are not these Russian women vigorous, emancipated, comrades to man in every national and progressive movement? Has the sex-ridden world ever seen such camaraderie? And yet this Russian treats me like a Turk.

As soon as Russian holidays are over I shall cease to be merely a hotel denizen and go just across the Moika to live with Olga Stepanovna, my godmother's friend; perhaps Russia then will give up her secret. Olga Stepanovna called to-day, archly pretty in her furs, wistful brown eyes, cheeks pink from

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the cold and that intangible fineness that satisfies in friendship. She is private secretary at one of the embassies where she and her husband often danced at the embassy balls. Some story, I am certain, lies back of that chiseled face, struck off so incisively with Slavic gaiety and finished so softly with Slavic gentleness.

M. Novinsky came, too. I discovered my voice making off into forbidden side-streets of delight as we whisked away in a breathless sleigh to collect our luggage from the Customs. It is delicious to see a face which does not press in the fact of one's alienage. Russia is stranger even than China; the very extravagance of China sets it apart, but Russia one expects to penetrate, and does not.

The Customs were a Fingal's cave. Each bearded giant arriving bowed to the room, kissed the hands of the women clerks, and crossed himself to the ikons in the corner. Over all hovered an ancient, musty mystery.

"I wish I might see it with American eyes," said M. Novinsky.

"They have all been clipped from the Civil War," I ventured. "I have seen them all on my grandfather's wall."

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"That is Russia," answered M. Novinsky, himself a particularly modern and immaculate note in this ancient, ikoned murkiness, "the oldest of Old World settings, and the newest of ideas." I wondered what it meant to him, returned from "beyond the borders," all this shagginess, this superstition, this unventilated North.

M. Novinsky's card accelerated the pace and augmented the bowing. He is bringing magnificent brocades and Han bronzes. The official passed our trunks perfunctorily after he had tried to open a cake of my soap. I was closing my luggage when my glance fell upon a trunk at the other end of a room from which the examiners were lifting guns! Beside it stood a man with particularly well-poised shoulders and blue eyes.

"Look!" I whispered to M. Novinsky. "That man—the mine-owner's servant."

The sharp glance which M. Novinsky turned upon him had little of the exquisite dreamer.

"*C'est vrai*," he answered, speaking peremptorily to the boy who was folding the brocades. "Let us go." He put me quickly into a sleigh.

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My interpreter was silent and abstracted as we flew back to my respectable hotel through the pastel streets, clinging limpet-wise to that elusive sleigh which threatened to leave us at every corner. As for me, my color sense was becoming acclimatized. There was a miraculous flying beauty this afternoon, I admit, in the spires and domes, seen dimly through a vaporous gray, the pale gold of the monastery crosses rising amid the black filigree of the trees, and the whiteness of the canals broken into linear patterns by the barges. It is the vanishing and unreal beauty of the north, a bit low-keyed and evanescent for eyes accustomed to the peacock Orient.

But the Customs incident. I have heard that rifles have been imported from Tsingtau which certain treacherous Russian factories have used as models for accumulating stores of ammunition fitting German—not Russian guns. Have I seen the first undercurrent in “superb, mysterious Russia”?

To-morrow is Russian Christmas. M. Novinsky despatched a hasty note by messenger, and then we sat at the window, drinking tea and watching the sleighs dash up and bear off the trees from the great square in front of

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St. Isaac's Cathedral. There had been a massed formation of stiff firs pointing greenly and blithely the chill Petrograd skies, when I awoke, but the ranks were now plainly decimated. The Nevsky Prospekt might almost be Chicago or New York, except that it is more snowy, more furry, and there are more galoshes, more horses, and fewer motors. Benevolent old gentlemen poke eleventh-hour turkeys in the ribs; the small boy is lost among the black-booted officers and baggy-trousered, short-haired students; the crowd is beparceled with packages from the sweet-shops and jostles—no, the crowd does not jostle as in America. Russia is of the East.

"Christmas is not the *festa* in Russia that it is in England and America," I observe.

"No, with us the occasion magnificent is Easter. Then the angels on the top of the cathedrals trail flaming torches against the sky and all the dusky interiors shower candles from the highest vaulting. And it is congruous that it should be so. Christmas, the birth, for the Anglo-Saxon with his roots in family and home. Easter, the resurrection, for the Slav, always in quest of God!"

A certain passion kindled in M. Novinsky's

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face as we stood at the window silently watching the mammoth square enveloped in the oncoming dusk and the great cathedral, ever remote in its majesty, now still farther within its shadows; the granite columns gleaming solemnly as gleam their kinsmen on the Nile, the great dome lost in the chiaroscuro of night. The Russians have a charming word, which you understand only in Russia—*sympatechnie*, a word that grows tenderer in Russian than its counterpart in French. Do Russians love Russia? Not perhaps as the Britisher loves the bonny isle, its sticks and stones and every inch of the hawthorn hedges—no, not thus. The immensity of steppe and tundra cannot thus be gathered into an intimate personal love. Rather as the tragic mother is Russia loved—as one loves the sorrowing Mother of God. I had thought of Russia as fatal, mysterious, medieval, but to-night as I watch the moon rise over St. Isaac's she seems, rather, gentle, melancholy, brooding.

VII

IN A RUSSIAN HOUSEHOLD

IT seems unco' strange to be part of a Russian household, perched on a white canal flowing under a red bridge, a magnified winter Japan. Opposite, the new hotel Astoria strikes the one American note in Petrograd; on the other side stands the Russian House of Lords. From my window I can see the graceful Italian Embassy and what remains of the German Embassy after the populace had effaced the nude figures which had always offended their taste. Farther down, where the Moika wanders out to the Neva, the yellow stucco palace of Prince Yusupoff stirs one's sense of romance. Othello himself might emerge from the iron gates. A place marked surely for Shakespearian tragedy! I am as puffed up as a pouter pigeon after this Russian fashion of welcoming a new householder! Bowls of

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acacia from M. Novinsky fill the room with fragrance; and from the General came a cake of parts, iced and garlanded like a German *denkmal*, borne in by a retinue, the *dvornik* and two little peasant maids.

A Russian house is designed for nothing so prosaic as living, but for the magnificence of entertaining. Our rooms open in a row; the ceilings are high, the windows French, the floors are the beautiful polished floors that one associates with Russia after one has lived in this land of wood. My room is long and narrow and white, like a prioress's chamber. At night I put a red cushion on the floor and sit in the glow of my stove in the wall. Olga Stepanovna, finding me thus, named me *Tziganka*. *Tziganka*—the blithe Russian word for gipsy. It does bring back the feel of junk and caravan days. Broad-waisted Sasha supplies the stove with tindery birch bark, the ruddy glow splashing her arms, white like the birches themselves.

Olga Stepanovna says that when spring opens I may have my *petit déjeuner* on the balcony under the white umbrella, while the barges trail past. It sounds Italian and tempting, *n'est-ce-pas?* But the snow drifts

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like the setting for *Snyeguritchka* (The Snow Maiden), and in the mean time I am content with the fire gleaming across the spaces of the polished floor and on the dull gold of old bindings in the drawing-room and a cantankerous general who hangs opposite the windows. The samovar is always set, and Sasha or Dasha near to give me tea. Russian tea we have at nine at night on the gay blue-and-red peasant cloth.

This Russian drawing-room interests me immensely; full of luxurious trifles, bearing an air of French sophistication, but wrapped indisputably in the atmosphere of a country larger than France; reminiscent of the day when the Russian noble sought everything French and despised everything Russian, but wearing its French taste as a decoration, not the measure nor the mold of its spirit. From the massiveness of the furniture and a general lavishness, it seems to a French drawing-room as a man's apartment to a woman's. There is more than a suggestion of the sensuous Orient—a case of damascened daggers and some Persian pottery. One need not scratch this drawing-room deep to find the Tartar! And I know nothing more Slavic than this

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acme of elegance underlaid with the barbaric.

We are a quiet household; Olga Stepanovna, my godmother's friend from her St. Petersburg days, and now my hostess; Agasha Feodorovna, a gray old Russian governess of Olga Stepanovna (Olga Stepanovna shelters all strays, witness Agasha Feodorovna and me); Sasha and Dasha, peasant maids; and Dolly, a white doggie asleep on a blue velvet chair. Little Dasha wakes me with peasant roundelays—in the firm and shining-eyed conviction that she serves a princess—and old Agasha tells fairy-tales around the samovar at night. After this enveloping mantle of Russian kindness, all other is a thin, worn little shawl.

It was sitting in this drawing-room last night that Olga Stepanovna told me something of the history of the Novinskys.

"One of the most interesting families in Russia," she said, watching the fire, "and in Russia, you know, it is far less a matter of title than it is of great families. I knew Madame Novinska when she was a girl, the young Princess Korovotskaya. Originally, I believe, they were French barons who had fled

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to Russia at the time of the Huguenot massacre; another branch went to England, and another to Italy. The members of this branch have intermarried with Russians until they are pure Russian; no entangling German alliances. The great-great-grandmother of this family was a woman of great spirit, whom the Empress Elizabeth admired to the extent of granting her immense estates in Crimea. It was in the days when largesse from the crown was on a colossal scale, not only lands, but revenue, and these land-barons were potentates in their own right, not unlike the lesser Indian rajahs. There is a spicy diary, I believe, in the Novinsky family, describing this family traveling to and from the Crimea—carriages, outriders, postilions, children, tutors, governesses, servants by the score—in the style of *le grand baron*. The Novinsky collection of miniatures is one of the best in Russia, and one of the family married an Italian from whom she inherited a gallery of Italian portraits. You will see this great gallery at the Novinskys'. Madame Novinska herself much resembles her French ancestress. Dmitri Nikolaivitch's father was her cousin, a gallant man who lost his life in the Crimea.

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"They have always stood for Russia great in the best sense; Monarchists, but liberal. Madame Novinska's father freed his serfs voluntarily and established schools for them. In spite of the fact that they have all been educated abroad—in Paris, in Vevey, in England—they have devoted endless time and constructive work to their estates and to the agrarian problem; and it is not always easy to work with the peasants, especially in Tver, where their land lies. They have always been patrons of Russian art, too, even in the dark days, when every one was building hideous memorials to German art. In the famine of 1905 Tolstoi counted them among his chief support, and Madame Novinska has had a school for the revival of the ancient peasant weaving and embroideries. A splendid family you will find in the Novinskys, and Dmitri Nikolaivitch, a son worthy of this tradition—and a charming younger Russian. It is the hope of Russia's salvation, this type of young Russia, and not the fanatic radical with neither experience in governing nor tradition, with no test of practical action to balance his ungovernable theories and no conception of the golden mean in his talk-intoxicated brain.

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The fall of bureaucracy, the establishment of constitutional monarchy, backed by such influence as that of the Novinskys—ah, there is the hope of Russia. Would that there were a hundred thousand of Dmitri Nikolaivitch among the young landed nobility—anywhere—among any class. Yes, a splendid tradition—the Novinsky tradition.”

I was sitting in front of the fire this afternoon, pondering a number of things—I am still a prisoner of the poison mists—when little Dasha appeared, with M. Novinsky in her train, little Dasha stammering and blushing as if she had entangled for me a grand duke in this black-booted, immaculate figure with the smile of a young Beethoven.

“*Nu, Américaine*, I have come to carry you off to the brilliance of Petrograd,” M. Novinsky said, depositing his stick with Dasha, who blushed with pleasure as if some one had bestowed upon her a coronet.

“But,” I protested, “one does not go to ballet at three in the afternoon. And that is the brilliance of Petrograd, *n'est-ce-pas?*”

“No,” he said, with a blithe expression such as I had seen but once or twice on the steppe. “One does not go to ballet at three

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in the afternoon. One goes out on to the Mor-skaya, where all the Petrograd world assembles and the street flows like a river with those breathless sleighs, as you call them, and officers in red-lined capes and deep, silky furs; all the blues and grays deepen into velvet blacks, whites turn to silver and the air is a gauzy iridescence. It is the most perfect ballet setting in Russia! And then one drinks tea at a little place I know on the Nevsky—Russian tea, with honey cakes—and then one goes at five to the cathedral mass—for the brilliance of Russia is a brilliance of night and interiors.”

“In time I shall be counting day but a *cæsura*?”

“And night the consistent interval, as it is in Russian winter,” smiled M. Novinsky, gravely.

Dasha had been coming and going with the tea-things, her nose and chin and eyes shining like the seraphim. “*Nyet*, Dasha. No *samovar* to-day. I am carrying the *barishnya* away for tea and for mass. *Otchen kraseevi*—it’s very beautiful, mass at Isaac’s.” There is something of the Celt in M. Novinsky; something of that exquisite sensibility of a race

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old in living. I had never been more aware of it than when he spoke with his amazing gentleness to the little peasant. Is this the Russian noble, this wearing smooth of the grooves, or is this only Dmitri Nikolaivitch?

Petrograd is brilliant by night and interiors. I saw it to-day. And of all the pale background the shimmering opulence of the cathedrals is the richest punctuation. Every traveler finds that the land through which he travels is a land of contrasts, and I am no exception. Russia is extravagant in her extremes. And from the artist's point of view there is no more breathless turning of the page than that from the wan streets to the cathedral interiors, aglow with jewels and the sheen of gold and silver, and hung with moving veils of incense.

I have never crossed the square and failed to be inexpressibly thrilled. It is a splendid medieval pageant: the heavy massing of the shadows in the great spaces; the dusky gleam of myriad candles high in the vaulting; the ancient barbaric mystery of the ikons; the fall of light on the iridescent chasubles of the priesthood emerging from the gloom of the chancel.

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"It is true," I confessed to M. Novinsky as we stood apart in a niche. "There is a magnificent of splendor in this shadow-filled, incensed, and jeweled dusk, beside which an English cathedral seems cold and a Chinese temple barren."

M. Novinsky's face bore something of the rapt look with which he handles an old ivory. "Vereschagin painted it in his Japanese interiors," he said, lifting his eyes to the blue light playing about the *lapis lazuli* columns, "this immemorial magnificence, this heaping of treasure without ostentation, but with an exaltation strange to the intellectualist of the West. Once having seen a Russian cathedral, one can never doubt that Russia's Christianity is of the East, and her spirit of worship is that of the oldest of mankind." As he spoke with his eyes turned upward to the pillared dusk of the cathedral—Egyptian in its majesty—I think something new stirred in my consciousness—of religion.

M. Novinsky was keeping an appointment, but I lingered for hours in the shadow of a niche while the stream of humanity ebbed and flowed around the feet of the Mother of God; and above the worshipers, through the spaces

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of the cathedral and into the vaulting, poured a flood of tender, compassionate Russian singing. The French say that a man is his style, but the Russian is his religion. And the more one stands in the sanctuary the more deeply one peers into his soul. Can one ever forget how the souls of Gorky's submerged ones floated away on a ribbon of sound when first one and then another took up the song in the damp bakery cellar? I have never heard such singing. Waves of religious feeling "rolled through me, as through a great organ."

I have always resented Life's caricatures—those faces nearing the journey's end, pitilessly distorted with toil and sorrow! To-day I saw a bit of human wreckage kneeling before the ikon of the Virgin Mary, touching her head reverently to the floor and crossing herself with the broad sign of the Russian cross. But when she raised her head her eyes fastened on the Mother of God with a tenderness for one moment of which I would gladly have given ten years of my life. Perhaps it is superstition—unquestionably, the Slav needs to associate works with faith—but I cannot but believe that this annihilation of self and

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adoration of a God is an excellent thing in human experience.

Next after the mother came a general, clanking the gold-tasseled sword of distinguished service. He did not touch the floor with his forehead, but he crossed himself slowly, kissed the ikons, and passed out, his silver spurs jingling faintly in an interval of the music. A glancing little figure in a red velvet hat and ermine tripped up the steps of the ikon, saluted the ancient lemon-hued visage with fresh lips, and passed on, making way for those dusty gray figures we had met in transit across Siberia. They are legless and armless now, and their stubby hair is hidden under white bandages; they are in charge of a Red Cross nurse and a sanitar. Evidently from a far province these, perhaps even from those wild Chinese borders we had passed. All the city is strange, the streets and the cathedrals; even the language is not theirs. But the ikons are their own—the Holy Fathers wisely saw that it should be thus centuries ago when they forbade a change in the sacred images—and it is the ikons they seek last before they go to battle and first—if ever they return.

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I walked slowly back, to find Olga Stepanovna deep in the outgoing embassy mail.

"*Nu, Amerikanka,*" she inquired, looking up with her arch, sparkling smile, "do you find us idolaters?"

"No," I answered. "Each nation must have its own worship as each nation its own idiom of language, and I can understand that for the Slavonic soul, passionate and idealistic, the form must be both glowing and mystical. In China and Japan I often felt that the temples were deserted because the gods had fled the souls of those who prayed, but here God *is*—because He is in the souls of the worshipers."

"That is true of the Slav," she said, her eyes filling as M. Novinsky's had filled with mysticism. "The Russian feels two things supremely: the brotherhood of man and the adoration of God. Self-annihilation in love—that's the heart of the Russian. The saving of his own individual soul interests him least of all. But he can find no comfort or inspiration in abstract logic or reason. He must have something at which he may light the flame of his spirit—something radiant and sensuous; legends, symbols; something mys-

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tical by which he may be caught up out of his own soul and merged with God—transmuted and purified. And do you know, modern as I am, I always feel an almost translated happiness in confessional and mass.”

“Does that solve the mystery of M. Novinsky, I wonder?” I pondered. “In his mind he is agnostic, but to-day he was full of the worship of the East.”

“Yes, I think that solves it. Dmitri Nikolaivitch is modern Russian,” said Olga Stepanovna, “struggling with new philosophies, but in his heart the anciently dreaming, mystic Slav.”

VIII

THE LEE OF THE WAR

THE Autocrat of All the Quartiers, the brush-whiskered old soldier who plays at being a *dvornik*, has just climbed the stairs with the post. Perhaps his heart is softened, too, by those blue and yellow junks that sail in with Chinese cargo. Oh, for one touch of Pekinese gold in this twilight North! There, in Peking, Lise's letter runs, the apricot roofs are piled with snow like monster meringues. Strings of camels, shaggily furred by a long summer in Mongolia, or bearers of tribute from Tibet, tread disdainfully the road beneath the crimson walls of the Forbidden City. Kites, yellow and blue and green, hang over the courts in a turquoise sky. Small need for geographers to explain to me the "*drang nach Osten*."

But I have found something here in this pale North almost as lovely as a bamboo grove

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—my second Russian caller, Mlle. Novinska. She came to-day in a smart Russian turnout, one of those low sleighs filled with furs, a dapper groom clinging bat-like in the rear, and black horses covered with blue nets. The nets are to prevent snow from flying into the sleighs, a comment on this Jehu-like Russian driving. If Undine had driven, I am sure her horses would have been like these.

Tall, picturesque, *le plus pur type* aristocrat, Mlle. Novinska. Long gray eyes, like Dmitri Nikolaievitch's, but more heavily fringed with black, and a curious Syrian quality like that of Zuloaga's *Countess Matthieu de Noailles*. She has that suggestion of sleeping power which is characteristic of the Russian, and an extremely rare simplicity of manner, the product of as many centuries of civilization as an English turf. One of her ancestors figures in *Boris Godunov*, which, perhaps, establishes her right to the manner. She wore a black frock and—it sounds melodramatically Russian, but it is true—a single string of extraordinarily beautiful pearls.

I was seized with a spasm of fright until she spoke, and then I breathed easily. It was English. The Russian offers this language-

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courtesy, as a matter of course, to more nationalities than any one else in the world. The Orient interested her, and we talked long of China. Curiously enough, the Russian travels far oftener in the West than in that ancient land, where his ancestry was brewed. All the capital is in black these days; hence Mlle. Novinska's wearing of black had meant nothing to me, but I can never forgive myself for the pain which a random remark of mine brought to her face—a look of despair which made me know once for all that I had never touched even the fringes of sorrow.

"Perhaps my brother has not told you," she said. I do not yet understand her confidence unless it be that desperate frankness that one may feel for a stranger. "I have lost my fiancé in one of the early battles in Galicia." And then she related to me the story, quietly, almost objectively.

He had been a young *maréchal de noblesse* in the province of X—— and he had long loved her. "And I," she said, with a wistful humility, "I loved freedom." And then came the call to arms. As she described the summons, the crowds marching through the streets, singing that wonderful soldiers' chorus,

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kneeling bareheaded before the Winter Palace and thronging the cathedrals with streaming faces, the sadness vanished and her eyes burned with deep Slavonic fire. I could feel her own enthusiasm take wing, I could see the brilliant man caught up in the exaltation of the moment, and I could hear Russia singing her high song.

"I could not refuse him then," she said, quietly.

It was early in September. His regiment went almost immediately to the front. At first there were letters, hasty scribbles, telling of the blue-and-gold autumn hanging over the trenches, of the stifling pits, of the will to kill and the blackness in the charge.

Then fell silence.

October brought no message. November, too, limped by without a line, but December laid the envelope from the War Office on her desk—"Lieutenant ——, shrapnel in his side while leading a charge"—and that was all. The brilliance fled; not a trace of the man who had gone out into the sunshine that September day, nor a sword, for remembrance' sake.

"I am sorry I had not told you," said

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M. Novinsky. "I was not certain of Natalya's wishes. It was difficult for you," he added, regarding me intently.

"Ah, but she is so young!" I cried. "She will find the will to live again. Tell me, Dmitri Nikolaievitch, that she will find enthusiasm for life!"

M. Novinsky had come in with a volume of Claudel for me and stood, his slim back to the fire, looking down with thoughtful eyes at the cathedral square and the tiny figures hurrying through the dusk under the bronze warrior, while the bells chimed from a tower across the Neva.

"I do not know," he said, gravely. "With us love is like worship. We fall in love more deeply and more seriously, perhaps, than you. It is an actual factor in our lives. You remember Sonia and Raskolnikoff. It is like that, *together*—a sort of spiritual regeneration. We put it at the heart of everything. We expect more of it—and without it we are more bereft."

The realities seem to be freshening and deepening these days in Russia, like some great tide. Love and religion! How poignant and beautiful life might be!

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I am all alone in the house, except for Sasha, Dasha, and the fire. It is Saturday night, a long evening to squander. Below-stairs the little girl who studies at the *conservatoire* is playing Tchaikowsky softly, softly. Dasha has just brought a big arm-load of birch bark for my stove in the wall, with a shy smile for the *barishnya*.

Dasha is not of that hierarchy of Perfect Servants, but she is one of the gems of Petrograd, along with St. Isaac's and the Alexander Third Museum and the ballet. Olga Stepanovna found her with a Russian priest in the country, where she performed the duties of a slavey at the rate of a dollar a month. The frock in which she stood, a shawl, and a string of beloved beads, together with an undersized body, were her earthly possessions; but she possessed one thing not earthly, and that was her soul. I had been in the house some three days before I really was aware of Dasha, so obscure, so like dust beneath everybody's chariot wheels, so completely merged with the background was she, and not until last week did she become a distinct pattern.

I was alone in the house when a strange

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melody came stealing into my study, a little melody full of minors and unexpected intervals and forbidden tuggings at one's heart-strings. The source, I discovered, was the kitchen, and I stood quite still outside the door. A bit of church ritual followed the quaint melody, one of those beautiful chants sung in every house of God in Russia. I gently pushed open the door. There in the great Russian kitchen, between the porcelain stove and the window, sat Dasha, singing and polishing brasses, which shone not more than her eyes and her nose and her chin. Blushing and wiping her hands on her red-and-blue peasant apron at the presence of a *barishnya* in the kitchen, she tumbled off her high stool. If you could have seen her—so shy and awkward, mattering so little to any one in the world, spawn cast on the tides of life in Russia's careless man-making, just a tiny candle in the wind! The fates must have lent me a seventh sense for Russian; somehow we made friends, and then she sang the little folk-song again and again for me, with blushes at every stanza. Afterward we talked mostly about mothers—her mother and my mother. It costs three dollars to go from

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Petrograd to her village, and she had not seen her mother for two years.

Olga Stepanovna she adores as one of the saints, and just now she leaned over my table to tell me that I am a *choroshaya barishnya*—a bonny lady. When I ask her why, she is reduced to saying that she is growing *used* to me. Such a Russian answer! When I ask the soldiers in the hospital, where I have been much of late, if they were frightened on the field or are tired in hospital, they invariably answer, as Ivan Caspitch had answered on the steppe, as Dasha answers, “No, *barina*; we’re *used* to it.”

Absurd little Dasha, running at every one’s bidding, aslant at an angle of forty-five degrees, which threatens to precipitate her and still further tip-tilt her premature nose, keeping the samovar for us at night after the theater, flying to buy the last edition of the *Vremya*, rushing down four flights of stairs to give Dolly an airing in the court. Once I knew her to surrender her only holiday in two weeks lest the doggie be lonely, alone in the house. Every morning I hear Agasha’s querulous, gray voice scolding and calling her stupid. Agasha is doubtless right; but in

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this strange land I would not exchange little peasant Dasha for G. B. S. himself!

Sasha is buxom and different. Her attitude is hands on hips and her expression a general, "What's to be done?" which usually means that something ought to be and nothing will be done. No one would charge Sasha with running—at any angle.

Sasha has been looking very troubled recently, and one morning last week, when she brought Olga Stepanovna's coffee, Olga Stepanovna questioned her. After fidgeting about the room, she finally stammered in some embarrassment, "Father's been troubling mother, *barina*."

"'Father's been troubling mother!'" repeated Olga Stepanovna. "But I thought your father was dead, Sasha."

"Yes, he's dead, but he has been troubling mother—and all the neighbors say it isn't right that father should trouble mother."

"But how, *milaya*? Tell me how your father troubles your mother." Olga Stepanovna gently questioned her. "How can the dead trouble the living?"

"He follows her, *barina*, and sometimes he

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walks opposite in the road when she goes to church."

"Do other people see him?"

"No, but she always sees him."

"Does he speak to her?"

"No, he doesn't speak to her."

"Is she afraid?"

"No, of course she isn't afraid. It's father. But why does he walk there? What are we to do, *barina*?"

Olga Stepanovna is a saint, and wise besides; moreover, it is not the first time she has had to deal with a Russian.

"You know the little Chapel of the Mother of God, Sasha?" she asked.

Sasha knew.

"Then you must go to buy candles and burn them there, and you must ask the priest to pray for your father's soul, and every day you must go and pray there, too."

Sasha would.

"When you have done that, I will write to your mother what you have done and that you have been a good daughter and that she must believe, for that will help the soul to find peace."

Fancy charging a *baba* with hallucinations

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and sending her to a nerve specialist! The priest is the peasant's nerve specialist, and there are many worse. After all, who knows? Perhaps it is we whose eyes are holden and the peasant mother who sees.

Now Sasha has been to pray and to burn candles and the priest has promised a Mass. And yesterday Olga Stepanovna wrote the old troubled mother in the country. Now may peace be upon the souls of the living and of the dead!

Sasha has just come in to ask if there is a post to America. The cook next door says there isn't.

We dwell under the lee of the war these days as under the shadow of a mighty Golgotha. My first waking consciousness is of soldiers marching, sharp hoarse *uras* and sometimes a strain of battle-song—the same troubled unease that I sensed that first morning in the darkness. It is not yet light, but the boots are trampling and, stirring luxuriously in my warm bed, I know that the cold gray squares in front of Kazan and the Winter Palace are filling with men. They are always in the background of one's consciousness, these figures dim in the

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half-light, their tall Cossack caps drifted with white, their coats turned ludicrously back like evening dress; simple sunburnt faces and muscular bodies, soon to be set against German steel. Crunch—crunch—crunch—a pause. I know that interval. Twenty yards of wriggling on their stomachs through the snow. A straw enemy hangs obligingly ahead and there is a bayonet charge, bloodless and without qualms. The paws of the bear hold a bayonet as deftly as a connoisseur would handle a bit of peachblow, and plainsmen's eyes trained to the steppe pierce easily the light mists of a cathedral square

Yesterday I was walking along the Neva when a group of those dusty gray figures thronging everywhere emerged suddenly from a side-street, their wiry Siberian ponies half hidden under their long capes, their bayonets upright like a shining bamboo forest, singing something short and primitive that breaks into strange rhythms, stirs the pulse, and grips the throat; gray, almost impalpable shapes wrapped in the mists, sitting their horses like centaurs. Russian accents are so strange to Anglo-Saxon ears that they set one wondering whether the whole Russian bio-

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logical and psychological beat is not different. The war correspondents declare that war is shorn of its picturesqueness; but how escape a flight of blood through the body at the sight of these Asiatics flung off when the mold of the world was young? There are far more here than in the station at Irkutsk; a sense of monstrosity primeval life such as one is aware of in Tolstoi's Cossacks. How Milton would have rolled out their names in sonorous cadences!—Persians, Kirghiz, Sarts, Turkomans, Ostraks, Armenians, Lithuanians, Dunkans, Afghans, Cherkesses, Zinians, Shamans, Osatines, Lesghians, Kalmuks, Tchudes, Georgians, Samoyedes, Tchouvachs, Tcheremisians, Tartars, Little Russians, White Russians, Great Russians. A sad loss for the great epic-maker! It is not liking I feel for Russia, but I am fascinated by her—fascinated by her potential power, the congress of these violent semi-Asiatic tribes; it thrills all the nomadic turbulence in me, exceedingly thinly veneered by civilization.

M. Novinsky came with me to-day to the American hospital, where I work twice a week, and the men talked as one Russian to another. In general, the Slav is more aware of the

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stream of his consciousness and its significance than the Anglo-Saxon. Even the peasant, a primitive esthete, tastes the flavor of his perceptions, expressing them crudely, but often with biblical force. Some one has imaged these two moods of emotion and appreciation as "two runners racing abreast, one oblivious of all but the motion, the other, with eyes not on the goal, not blind with the rush of it, but turned, deeply observant, on the face of his companion." That is the Russian; the Anglo-Saxon does not run, he plods—and singly.

The soldier fresh from the shock of battle-field is silent, but as the keen edge of memory is turned he grows more communicative. It was Sergei Pavlovitch who talked most to-day, Sergei Pavlovitch from somewhere deep in the Caucasus, eyes tender and blue as a girl's, cheeks as pink as a Siberian crab-apple.

"There were four of them," Sergei Pavlovitch said, relating an incident in Galicia—"three men and an officer. We found them in an old house. The officer would not surrender. He tried to throw himself down a well. We killed them—with bayonets. What else was to be done?" And the hands that

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held the bayonet delicately turned the stem of a pink tissue Easter rose.

I looked at Sergei Pavlovitch and I wondered, as I often wonder when I look at more weather-beaten faces, if these steppe eagles ever pity their foe. To-day I asked a trans-Siberian Cossack with a peaked head and a face that might have come from Dostoevski's *House of the Dead*, not a typical Russian face nor one from which you would expect quarter.

"Oh," he said, cheerfully, "when the order is passed through the trenches to charge, you shout and run. Everything goes black. You do not think. You kill." And then a slow smile began to overspread his face.

"How is it possible for the Russian to make a good soldier?" I asked M. Novinsky, as we turned away from the trans-Siberian Cossack. "His nature melts away into kindness like butter on *bleeni*, as the plain flattens away from the horizon."

"No Russian positively enjoys fighting except the Cossack," answered M. Novinsky with an amused smile. "The Russian is as unmilitary as the Chinese, but the world does not know it. It is the one factor to be con-

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sidered when the bogey of Pan-Slavism is held before Europe. The German? Of course the German knows this! and laughs contemptuously up his sleeve. But it is part of his game holding the Slavic peril over Europe. The peasant will fight, if he must, stubbornly and without squeamishness. It is for the Little Father. But his idea is always to be killed rather than kill. And zest? He has no zest for a fight as a fight. The Russian peasant harbors far less animal resentment than he is credited with; he is too much a 'brother' to all the world to hold a grudge; he has no logical mental insistence on right. The only resistance he shows consistently is a fatalistic lethargy. Do you know, if the truth were known, what every one of those fellows is dreaming of? A little *izba* under the birches. A Cossack Europe, did Napoleon say? Russia might roll over on Europe in her sleep, but she would never have the desire or the collected energy to step on her."

There are two new cases this week, sent over from the central distributing hospital. One is a pink-cheeked boy with exaggeratedly solemn blue eyes and an equally exaggerated appetite. He is in the hospital for what is

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termed a scratch—a fissure an inch deep the length of his leg—and pneumonia which he caught in trench water and by which he feels himself disgraced. When the men chaff him his blue eyes fill with tears and he doubles up his fists. He continues to look misused through dinner while he speedily stows away two plates of soup, two plates of meat and vegetables, and two bowls of *mannaya kasha*. The second patient is a beady-eyed little man with whom I sometimes play checkers. The expression of concentrated cunning on his face when he tracks my men has opened a new window in the peasant soul and explained some of the cruelties against man and beast in the uprising of 1905 which I had never understood. I can never win at checkers and I should not like to match wits with him seriously. To-day Gregory stood on his crutch behind me and helped the *Amerikanotchka* against the beady-eyed man.

We were in the midst of it when the Ambassador came with the aide-de-camp of the Emperor, sending a wild flutter through the hospital. Oddly enough, the aide is a friend of M. Novinsky's, a keen, dry military man, and we strolled through the hospital with



*Life welling up from depths passionate,
barbaric*

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him. It was the first time I had seen M. Novinsky with a man of his own rank since we had come to Petrograd, and his ease and knowledge of affairs set me wondering whether he was not the cosmopolitan first and Slav second. No, he is Slav first. And if I do not mistake, something of significance is shaping itself behind those steadfast Slavic eyes.

Vereshagin did a mad thing last week. Some one had sent a guitar, with a blue bow, which every one has had a turn at strumming. There are two *balalaikas* also, and sometimes the music mounts fast and furious, one voice leading and others taking up the song at different intervals in Russian fashion. Suddenly Vereshagin sprang into the center of the room, whirling and leaping in the *Russkaya* and then dropping, spinning on his haunches, a flying gray ball. It was a reckless thing to do and in a moment he was smiling weakly at the nurse who put him back in bed. But for the moment he had not been Vereshagin wounded, but Vereshagin Russian, gloriously alive.

The saddest figure in the hospital is "the man who was." No one knows what has

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happened, a shell bursting near him or only the strain. He is really young, but nature has slipped a cog somewhere and left him the oldest thing in the world. I never see him but that I am reminded of that ancient man of Dostoevski's moaning: "How old I am! Oh, God, how old I am!" All day long he lies on his back and stares at the ceiling, or totters weakly about trying to find his cot, with a troubled, weary gesture toward the back of his head. He is utterly unable to talk, and the instinct to feed seems to have fled, too. *Kasha* from a metal spoon meant nothing. Luckily some one thought to put a wooden spoon in his hand. For a moment he held it, while we all watched breathlessly, and then the routine laid deep in his nerves itself—instinct stronger than injury asserted itself. His hand slowly began to make the journey from bowl to mouth. Opposite him lies Piotr Alexandrovitch, above whose cot hangs a copy of a German airplane. He had learned the lines well enough those tortured days when the original hung over the Russian trenches. Piotr Alexandrovitch carves realistic Sisters of Mercy, too, dragged away by Uhlans. They are not from life, thank Heaven, but

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from a magazine sent by one of the embassy's secretaries.

Turgenev spoke truly when he said that the Russian never fumbles in his pocket for a word, but plucks it from underneath his heart. Here is a sentence from a letter which I have happened to come upon, written by Vassili Vassilivitch to one of the "little mothers" at the hospital:

Greetings from Vassili Vassilivitch, dear little mother. *Slavu Bogu!* Glory be to God that you are well. God keep you in health, *matushka*, dear little mother. And may God keep in health all the kind Americans who have taken our bloody wounds upon their hearts, who gathered us into a clean white nest as God's little birdie gathers her young under her wing. *Gospode Tebye.* God be with you.

Imagine this from Tommy Atkins!

IX

A. RUSSIAN LYRIC

IN an elbow of the sea, beyond the Neva, lie islands where summer Petrogradski sip their *kvass* under a green tracery of trees amid the luminous white nights of May; islands that now sleep solitary under the somber shadows of Böcklin's Island of the Dead. It was there that Dmitri Nikolaievitch and Natalya Nikolaievna were giving a skating party last night for two officers home from the front—an eerie background for an arabesque of gaiety, an extravaganza such as I venture could occur only in the Russian capital.

Recklessly mad driving it was, whisking in one of those vanishing sleighs, on, on through the swift white silence, the horses' hoofs casting a shower of sparks in the furtive white evanescence. The Russian love of space and silence with its *motif* of furious speed—I often

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wonder if it does not symbolize to the Slav the background of eternity, against which weaves the swift shuttle of life—for its little while.

Last night the quaint little *datcha*, ablaze with lights, beckoned through the falling snow like an Enchanted House in the Woods. The Petrogradski often take these summer houses, sheltered under the pines, for a night or a week-end, and send servants ahead to build fires and fill the house with flowers. Last night there were fragrant magnolia, and poinsettia in bronze bowls, and dwarfed bushes with clusters of red berries. A band of gipsies sat under the stairway, black-browed pirates; the firelight splashed the polished floor with shadows like pools of blood and shone on the medals and uniforms of officers, and on gleaming hair and eyes and shoulders of women. From a narrow supper-table, lighted with candles and rich with old silver, the Novinsky servants in livery served Russian delicacies. Intoxicating, these gorgeous Russian interiors, after the eternal snow! And over all and through all stole the gipsy music, having in its fire a drop of Russian tenderness—alluring, ravishing mu-

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sic, singing of moonlit *izbas* sleeping under the birches, of Marya awaiting her lover by the pale deep river, of sweet nights under the stars. How fascinatingly alien it was, like a scene from *Anna Karenina*! Without being able to define it, one was aware of a different background, other memories, other origins; something enormously natural and unconscious, no premature sobering down; life welling up from depths passionate, barbaric.

The men were all officers, mighty-bodied men for the most part, in high black boots and silver spurs. I liked the guests of honor, a bearded Muscovite and a tawny, triangular-faced man from Kiev. These are akin to the men at Sebastopol who inspired in Tolstoi a so cheerful conviction of the invincibleness of the Russian people. Inevitably his words recur to one's memory:

What they are doing, they do so simply, with so little effort and exertion, that you are convinced that they can do a hundred times more—that they can do anything.

One looks at these men with their tremendous *élan* and one hopes that Tolstoi's tribute

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to the soldiers of Sebastopol might be repeated to-day:

You understand that the feeling which makes them work is not that feeling of pettiness, ambition, forgetfulness which you have yourself experienced, but a different sentiment, one more powerful—and this cause is the feeling which rarely appears, of which a Russian is ashamed, that which lies at the bottom of each man's soul—love for his country.

Russian women are not often beautiful, to my mind. Their mouths, like Russian landscapes, are too wide and their features are not neatly modeled, but there is a fiery languor about them which makes them often fascinating, as was my Siberian *Malva*. There were two Turkestan princesses to-night, with bird-like black eyes, hair like fine spun glass, and agile movements, and a fair-haired little Polish countess who danced the mazurka, stamping her tiny feet with such frenzy that she had to be carried fainting to the balcony. Mlle. Novinska, in her dark furs, looked a delicate Circassian gipsy. M. Novinsky, more nearly the debonair personality which made him the most desired dinner-guest in Peking than I had seen him since we had left the Chinese capital, was curiously elated, a fact

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which puzzles me—in him whose every movement and expression is significant.

Like the table-linen at Harbin, it was indefinably Russian—the background of white silence, the lyric gaiety, the swift, exhilarating speed, the skimming over the ice under the velvety shadows of the pines, the ring of the skates in thin night air, brittle as porcelain—while there, somewhere in the dimness which we touched, lay Kronstadt and Riga and the relentless German menace. And then back through the pines, across the snow, laced delicately and pooled with shadows—a plunge from the ghostliness into the ruddy firelight, to dance again to the gipsy music, music which sang not of a pale and frozen north, but of the sunny hills and purple skies of Little Russia, of sapphire cliffs and warm sweet winds, and nights along the Black Sea.

And good talk—exhilaratingly good talk! The bearded officer from Moscow was my supper partner, and we talked of Russia. Every one talked; whatever the assembly, the end is always the same in Russia—*talk*. It was like a scene from a Russian novel; words whirling, turning, thickening like snow; talk ranging far in philosophy and religion,

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with an amazingly keen mental and spiritual avidity, a freer camaraderie than ours and a different atmosphere.

"And how do you feel Russia?" asked the tall Muscovite, himself a cosmopolitan of a long residence in India and two years in an Egyptian monastery.

"How do I feel Russia?" I smiled involuntarily at the bearded man as he put the stupendous question. The thing I had been trying to formulate ever since I strayed into its immensity! "Perhaps I see it as the East, coming to it as I do. '*Nu kak moré*—it is as the sea,' as Russians say of the Volga. I cannot express it."

"Certainly, the Eastern gate is the only one through which to enter Russia," rejoined the Muscovite, a light stirring in the depths of his melancholy eyes. "Russia is not a nation, but a congress of peoples—largely Eastern. To understand Russia, one must strike her at the source and follow her westward in space, exploring her various ages—the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, the sixteenth century, the eighteenth century, the twentieth century, and that wonderful era of thought which she is projecting, to-morrow's century. No man

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can comprehend us who backs in on us from modern Europe and stares at us like a crab."

"But further? How do you feel the East in us?" urged the little man from Kiev.

"Curiously enough, my first impression came one night at the opera in Paris," I said, slowly, recalling with amazing vividness the memory. "*Ivan the Terrible*. Do you remember the serfs crawling on all-fours under the knout? It haunted me for weeks, that cringing on the ground. In America, it dropped out, but it has shot back now, in these figures crouching in the cathedrals. There is a deep race-memory of fear in their nerves; I see it in the gestures of the dancing, too."

"It is a part of the carrying over of the East in us," agreed the man from Kiev, who himself looked a direct descendant of the Golden Horde. "We inherit a drop of fire, too, from those Mongolian horsemen, which we are all proud to have mixed with our somnolent Slav blood. It is an interesting sum total, if one cares to take his world ethnologically."

"It is China that I see particularly," I continued, a hundred images crowding my

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memory, as he paused, inquiringly. "Here is the same vigorous use of color bespeaking an unwearied imagination. In the Forbidden City at Peking, as at the ballet, I am aware of strange vales of the imagination and peaks of fantasie which never, never in my world could have been.

"There is the same lethargy; here, too, as in China, the resistance and cohesion of the peasantry; the bottomless rage; the 'just about' quality of China that can never hang a door or run a government with precision; the mandarinish wish for seclusion; the sedulous mystery surrounding the Czar as it always enveloped the Son of Heaven and still attends the Japanese Emperor; 'squeeze,' that peculiar form of graft that is as purely of the East as are its fauna and flora, sprung largely, I presume, from the form of government—"

"Yes, that trait which is ruining us in this war as it did in the Napoleonic campaigns and in the Russo-Japanese war," broke in the man from Kiev, passionately.

"China and Japan at first interested me most," I groped my way. "And they must always be of enormous interest, all that toiling,

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sweating humanity welling out of the earth to flow a little while above surface and then to disappear again in her shadowy caverns—however cities and civilizations may rise and fall, a life that goes on forever. And this same vast earth-tide of life, which staggers imagination, Russia has; vague, immense power, barbaric, potential. To pass from Europe into Russia is, as some one has said, to pass from something ordered and advanced to something unordered and portentous, to be engulfed and swept away in the tide. The same portentousness that one senses in China is here, but here it is something vastly nearer, breaking the flood-gates. Russia is more overwhelming than the Far East. In China and Japan one stands above the stream and shares the life vicariously, but in Russia one cannot escape. Russia is of one's own color! In a word, Russia is to me the most mysterious, the most troublous force in the world, freighted at present with a conspicuous significance. The body of Asia, the thought of Europe, with this one enormous advantage over Europe: because of her immense naturalness of life, she casts up from her depths a product amazingly, cellularly fresh. I think it must thrill

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one, as if a voice had spoken from the void, this volcanic thought, these spiritual conceptions cast up as if by some primeval force, *de profundis*. Only one thing fascinates me equally, and that is her convulsive contrasts. One can grow dizzy wandering through the labyrinths and wondering where one may lay down one's questionings and say: 'This is true of Russia.' America is a melting-pot, but Russia holds her elements unamalgamated. Her paradoxes are unresolved; to state a truth about her is to be false to her. There is no encompassing her; she is not only the buffer between East and West, but between East and Future. As you say, '*She is as the sea.*'"

The Muscovite, who had been listening with serious intentness, took up the theme where I had laid it down.

"Russia—the old and weary, the melancholy; but so young that she seems but half shaped from the black earth. Russia—barring a new world of delicate psychological and spiritual truths; but dark medieval and barbaric. Russia—innately democratic and individualistic; but ruled by despotism. Russia—without conceit, even to humility; but

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with a tidal assurance of her own destiny. Russia—quickly flaming up in her emotions; but dying down again to apathy. Russia—the tender lover of the despised and rejected of men; but shot through with Oriental cruelty. Russia—the religious. Russia—the unmoral. Russia—superb, fatal, mysterious. Russia—also gentle, monotonous. Russia—with a bewildering, multitudinous variety; but as ununified as the sands of the sea.

“To my mind, Russia symbolizes the romantic in art,” he continued, enlarging on his subject, “as France symbolizes the classic. Russia is not to be reasoned about or put into bounds. Russian natures are not small natures, easily labeled, but large natures, uncoralled and uncorrelated. Russia of all nations sings with color, like the walls of some old monastery; enormously natural but seldom vulgar. Of all people, she shows the least evidence of growing didactic; of all people, the least economical of her medium. Russia, *multum*, but not *multum in parvo*! Russia, the uttermost contradiction of the principle, maximum effect with minimum means; Russia in her life, as in her art, lavish and unrestrained and yet without coarseness—

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living, as she does, with a deep unconsciousness. That fine logic, which is the glory of the French, Russia has none of. But her disorder, is it the 'disorder of the forest and the stars'? What will be the fate of this inchoate thing in the new world which seems imminent, where nothing will be left to chance? Or is there a new order and a new symmetry, beyond the order and the symmetry of lesser foolish men, that Russia has divined?"

The tall Muscovite had risen and was standing before the fire, his head outlined against the paneling like a young Turgenev.

"What do you see as Russia's greatest gift to the world?" I asked, as he stood looking at the fire, wrapped in abstraction.

"Russia offers three great gifts, as I see them," he answered, rousing himself. "One is pushing out the walls of life, exploring new paths of joy and pain, discovering a new, intense mental passion; secondly, the delicate psychological analysis of the soul voyaging about these new paths; most rare of all, the acceptance of pain. We are not the only nation to discover the beauty of pain, but it was Dostoevski who caught the great salutary value of pain—suffering not alone, but *suf-*

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fering together. Do you realize that Russians never write romances? We have proven outworn that theory that it is idealists who, in order to escape the sordidness of the world, write romances. We Russians are the supreme discontents of the world, but we do not write romance; we are the ultimate word in realism. And this because we have pierced the shell and have discovered the inner, fantastic romance of reality, the alluring romance of the mental and spiritual. It is the romance of which Hamlet is a typical hero and Dostoevski's Raskolnikoff another. Raskolnikoff committed no crime of the passions, but of intellectual curiosity, a passionate mental questioning. He wished to discover whether he was a super-man with a right to kill the old pawnbroker—the 'louse'—as Napoleon murdered his thousands, or whether he was only 'vermin,' too. And besides these romances of the mental and spiritual, the romance of pirates and dungeons—even that accidental personal adventure which the Anglo-Saxon accepts as love—is trivial. In these features, the Russian must be read geographically and historically. With that great outlying monotony of earth, neither sea nor

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mountains, not any chance under a tyrannical rule to find his destiny, the Russian has been driven in to search his own being. And searching the human, he has come upon a mystery as disordered and as infinite as the sands of the sea.

“And with what marvelous psychology he has added to our knowledge of that restless creature, the soul! The delicacy with which Tolstoi reads the soul in terms of the body! And Dostoevski begins where Tolstoi leaves off. After Russian literature, Anglo-Saxon novels seem but attenuated creations. Perhaps most precious of all he has contributed to life is the recognition of pain as a part of destiny and that moral fervor to experience it.

“It may be that never, never will Russia emerge, not out of the chaos of her institutions and government, but out of chaotic chasms of her own being. But if ever she does, she will be the superbly great people of the earth! I have a vision of the Slav, when lesser peoples, more easily catalogued and composed, are ended and their cities dust and their kings rest with that other mighty warrior, where

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The wild ass stamps o'er his grave, but cannot break his sleep—

I have a vision of the Slav, with his roots as deep as the roots of Isdragil itself, towering high against the sky with an incomprehensibly beautiful spiritual burgeoning. But who can say—of Russia?"

The tall Muscovite spoke mystically, like a prophet of new Russia, and I looked at this superb man, accepting his destiny of pain, and as I listened to his rich voice chanting this vision of Russia I saw again the steppe, the gray gulfs of mists, and I heard the wind moan in the forest; and, again, like an illumination, the words of Georg Brandes flowed through my memory.

Black land, fertile land, new land, grain land—the broadly constituted, rich, warm nature—the broad unlimited expanse which fills the mind with melancholy and hope—the incomprehensible darkly mysterious—the womb of new realities and new mysticism—Russia and the future.

The womb of new realities and new mysticism!

X

RUSSIAN TREACHERY

THE leaves are turning swiftly these days. Yesterday, Russia lyric; to-day, Russia treacherous and intriguing! A look in at the hospital to inquire about Vereshagin and to deliver sweets resulted in staying for tea. I can never resist the white oil-cloths and the brown bath-robés chanting a sonorous grace to the decadent little ikon in the corner. They say we are breeding revolutionists here. I do not know. Fancy what decent food and clean beds must mean to these men, accustomed to cabbage soup and a handful of straw!

And after the hospital, a walk home along the Neva. These veiled days in the north are beginning to have a wondrous charm for me. To-day the Neva stretches far out to sea, a white mystery, only the black hulls breaking it in impressionistic designs. Peter

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and Paul, sometimes a golden sword, rises to-day but a smoky pencil against the sky.

It was in the station at Irkutsk that I began to realize the greatness of Russia, and to-day I gave the "green bough of my affection" to this pastel of Peter's. It's a Turner, the softest in the world; a Japanese sketch, quickly done, half effaced. On filmier days, but a shadow city washed over with white. I have searched my vocabulary through and yet I can never express the charm of its spectral half-tones, rubbed together with a wonderfully soft blue atmosphere, picked out with the charcoal of the park trees and warmed with a dash of buff in the old Admiralty. There is something of the phantom city about it, after all. On a late winter afternoon no other city, not even London nor Venice, offers the mystery and beauty of Petrograd. I wonder that I ever could have missed it, low-keyed though it is.

I was just turning home along the Admiralty gardens when I came suddenly face to face with M. Novinsky, his compact figure and dreaming eyes pure Celtic that moment in the mists.

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"You!" I cried, with the joy of the unexpected.

"Yes." His eyes, set in Eastern fashion, smiled engagingly under his tall sealskin cap. "I was just on my way to pay my compliments. You are looking distractingly mysterious to-day, *Amerikanka*. You Americans are marvelous—your variety—*vsegda interesni*—"

"This is serious, M. Novinsky," I smiled. "Intrigue! My annals are no longer simple."

"You have been finding Russia a world for Stevenson or Sherlock Holmes?"

"Yes," I nodded, importantly. "I used to give the palm to those sumptuous caravansaries of Egypt, or to the dingy corridors of the Wagon Lits in Peking, but now I yield both to Petrograd."

M. Novinsky swung his stick at the statue of Peter the Great, rearing above the Neva.

When he was lodged in the blue velvet chair before the fire, while Dasha clattered the tea-things, shining with joy at the presence of the beautiful *barin* and singing the distracting delights of Olya's white feet in the river, I began the tale. The incident had really troubled me.

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"It came through one of Olga Stepanovna's clients, an American who is here for a gigantic order in steel. Olga Stepanovna has translated for him and we have seen him often at the house. In America he would not stand out from the background of a thousand others, an honest, self-made business man, but here in this old world he looks like an ingenuous child. Olga Stepanovna declares 'He never could have grown in Europe,' and it is quite true. The system of things as they are he has absolutely refused to accept. A government which pivoted on beautiful ladies he would have none of. He had his ideas as to the conduct of business in Russia. He would invite the Minister to luncheon, sign the contract with the cigars, and this sleepy old East would have learned something."

"And as usual he found no royal road—in fact, no road whatever to the Ministers, except through the engineers?" M. Novinsky lighted a cigarette.

"Exactly. It would have been an excellent international comedy of manners if it had not been so tragic, to watch the processional of emotions sweep his countenance—incredulity, irritation, anxiety, subjection. He was weeks

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by the clock learning even to get a petition before the Minister.

"Steamers have come and steamers have gone and still he waits to hear the Government oracle speak.

"Fortunately he has a fancy for the spots where Czars have been murdered, and Petrograd offers numerous such points for his diversisement. Whatever he had to teach Russia, Russia has given him her lesson first—patience.

"Sometimes the engineers come with him to Olga Stepanovna's for conferences, and storms of language sweep the house! The Yankee backs up against the fireplace, watching them with shrewd eyes. In sheer brains he is more than a match for these wolves in engineer's clothing, but in languages as uneducated as a savage. Of those soft, hissing sounds on which hang his millions he understands not a syllable. He does not even know French. He must wait for Olga Stepanovna's translation. I am sure that his dying word to the world will be, 'languages'!"

"He might not find another translator so trustworthy as Olga Stepanovna, though he 'searched through this great world with a

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candle by daylight,'" suggested M. Novinsky, flicking his ash.

"As a matter of fact, Olga Stepanovna is the only soul in Petrograd he trusts," I assented, as Dasha installed the samovar. "He will not stir an inch to the Ministers without her, and, of course, his helplessness appeals to all the Russian in her. . . . After months of quibbling, yesterday was set at the Ministry for receiving the estimates from the six competing firms, the representatives of which—to make a perfect melodrama—all live at the Hotel de l'Europe. At eight last night Sasha was bundled into a shawl and despatched to the hotel with the American's estimates. Olga Stepanovna had dropped into her chair when the telephone rang. The American! The papers? Had Sasha been waylaid and robbed or was she only gossiping with some stupid servant? Every quarter-hour from then until midnight the American telephoned. He was very commendably controlled, but he *was* angry. Olga Stepanovna walked the floor and wrung her hands.

"Nine. Ten. At twelve Sasha arrived, hands on hips, the picture of health.

"*Nu*, Sasha, quick, where have you been?

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The papers?' Olga Stepanovna's impatience flared up.

"*"Ai, barina, I was so ill,'* Sasha related, glibly.

"*"The papers—quick!"* Olga Stepanovna's eyes flashed.

"*"At the hotel, as you told me,'* Sasha wept, stoutly.

"Little Dasha, the sleepless, was asleep. How it happened no one ever knew, but in a trice the drowsy mite was bundled into a shawl and off through the snow to verify Sasha's tale. I should like to have witnessed the scene in the lobby of the hotel—Sasha, buxom and brazen, questioning his Braided and Buttoned Magnificence, the *portier*; and little Dasha peering out from her shawl, probably too awed by the *portier's* splendor to hear a word he was saying. The sleeping bell-boys were tumbled out and lined up for Sasha's inspection. In the end one of them remembered. Sasha had delivered the papers. She brought Dasha home with an *izvostchik*—and, extravagance of extravagances, two horses! And to-day she has a new collar and a string of beads."

"And the end, the blunt American?" M.

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Novinsky was smoking cigarettes silently, deftly, his eyes on the fire.

"Tales do have a way of rounding out to a full close in the East and not paling out half-way, as they do at home. But the end of this—I cannot say. The American came this afternoon, taciturn and gloomy. The papers had been found at three in the morning in the rooms of a pseudo-interpreter. That is all we know. Of course the terms had been tampered with, and of course the offers of the firms were not placed before the Ministry to-day. The American saw to that! And now the six-handed game may be months in narrowing again to an issue. Nine hundred thousand dollars the American had offered the engineers for the order—and it was not enough!"

"And to-day a contract for forty millions was signed at the Astoria. It means *poods* of silver to cross the palms of the engineers." M. Novinsky had sunk into abstraction.

I do not know how to explain the subconscious impulse that prompted my question. "What news from the front?" I asked, after a pause. "From the General?" I am still unable to account for the query.

M. Novinsky glanced at me quickly, his

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eyes narrowing to two steel points. "Why do you ask?"

"I don't know," I stammered. "I really couldn't say."

M. Novinsky sat with pale lips, graven like a statue.

"I confess to you," he said, wearily, "that, like Turgenev, I should often despair of my race were it not for the wonderful Russian language. Think me sentimental if you will, but it is my one consolation. When I consider this 'great, mighty, powerful, and free Russian language' I cannot but believe that it comes from a great people. Even as a boy lying on my back under the limes, making friendships with the poets, I felt its wonder. A language wrought in little *izbas*, in forests and on the steppe, despised and rejected as the language of serfs, even unclothed until Pushkin gave it the exquisite symbols of a poet, yet fragrant with the deeps of human life; the most powerful, the most burning, the tenderest language of the human soul. Surely such a language could not be conceived of but by a people sincere, powerful, and aspiring." He spoke so reverently that I hesitated to break his mood.

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"What will come to pass," I asked, softly, "when the peasants know that they were left to face German shells with bare hands while those who were responsible for them haggled across Petrograd counters for the last penny of booty?"

"I do not know—I do not know! Three of your engineers I am acquainted with. Three are Russians—three German—Russians from the province of Riga. Enough of the treachery is Russian, but you cannot imagine the complexity and penetration of German intrigue." He was holding himself in check, but his eyes were as intensely blue as the minaret of the Mohammedan mosque. "What a history Russia's has been! In the old days she was forced to rule with a hand of iron all those outlying turbulent tribes which meant Russia. That day has passed—partially. I believe Russia still needs something of a strong hand. There is a chance now for freedom, too, but Russia is caught in a power a thousand times more terrible than the knout of *Ivan Grozni*—the German bureaucracy. Always it has plunged its hands into the coffers of Russia, and now it is dribbling the Russian people through its hands like water. You

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cannot conceive what it is to live in a nation of peasants—a hundred and eighty million *peasants*. What chance has such a people—plastic, good-natured, ignorant—against Teuton masters? Treasure for German exploitation, that is what Germans have considered Russians—their proper gain—‘Russian pigs.’ Russia herself will never be conquered from the outside. To fight her is to fight the elements—winter—the steppe—Nature herself. Old amorphous Russia can close over her enemy as a jungle closes over its slain. Would that she could engulf and strangle now every German overseer, every German factory agent, every German-paid monk! It is the first step in the righting of Russia!”

M. Novinsky was pacing between the fire and the window, his hair slightly disordered—a feature far more alarming to me than another man’s complete disintegration. The tides had loosed. The serene man I had known had vanished and another had sprung up—white, straining, son of an emotional race, with a swift tongue and passionate movements.

“A monstrous net of intrigue—a net of treachery that must be broken if it takes every life in Russia.” He stopped with a

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sudden gesture at control and gazed moodily out over the hooded Moika.

The little French clock ticked steadily—while I sat in silence. A premonition chilled me as I followed him, of origins so different from mine, but in a thousand thousand ways, that mattered more—my nearest of kin, East or West—in all the world.

“The sucking and draining her dry from the inside, and flinging her up—pulpous dead flesh—*Bozhé moi!*”

The twilight deepened over the square while the lamp-lighter began his rounds over the Red Bridge. And then, as night began to weave her shimmering web about the branching trees and the dim canal, he sat down at the piano and played fragments of things Russian—a folk-song from Glinka; the melody of peasants dancing in the white night; a moving harmony of Borodin; a dissonance of Scriabine—fire and flood and the dissolution of the world; a mass of Mussorgsky's; the East Indian's song, unearthly sweet, from *Sadko*; fragments from Chopin, a dirge of Tchaikowsky, a *largo* of Rachmaninoff. I had never heard him play so stormily or so wistfully. The Russian hurricane seemed



*Everything that he loved was singing
its swan-song through his fingers*

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breaking over him, and everything that he loved and everything that he hated was singing its swan song through his fingers. And, as he played, everything that I loved and everything that I hated and feared in Russia crowded there in the darkness and filled the room with ominous shapes. *Bozhé moi!* and how much there is in Russia to love and hate and fear!

XI

THE HOUSE UNDER THE LIMES

THE *dvornik* rushes in; he begs pardon, but the house is on fire. It is inconveniently cold and I am thrust deep in an arm-chair and Balzac, but I slide out of my dressing-gown and dress myself for the street; whereupon in he rushes again, begs pardon, a thousand regrets, but the house is not on fire. These vacillating Russians!

It leaves me in somewhat the same state as my presentation. For I have been presented. No, not to the Czar, but to Madame Novinska. How I quaked when the envelope came, delivered by private messenger like a command from the Vatican. I felt that I must rush away to buy a white veil and souvenirs to be blessed. If there had been a choice, I am sure I should have chosen the Czar, for they say he always looks indifferent, as if he wanted to go home and play with his children.

THE HOUSE UNDER THE LIMES

M. Novinsky came for me, looking immaculate and grave. He is always immaculate and usually grave, except when he leans forward to talk to one quite personally, and then his eyes light with an exquisite sort of comprehension, the rarest tribute and the subtlest flattery to a woman. I had not seen him since we had talked of the intrigue in Russia, and there were a thousand things I longed to ask. But a pause seemed to have fallen upon us, like a pause before a sentence, as we rolled past the old coroneted houses on the English Quai. It was not a giddy sleigh, but one of the Novinsky carriages. I clutched at the skirts of my departing French verbs while M. Novinsky leaned on his stick, watching the Neva. The mother whom he worships and the withdrawn life in the old Faubourg St.-Germain of the Russian capital I had tried to imagine, but in vain. No more could I read him to-day—no trace of the furious Tartar, but an enigma, his eyes dark interludes, reflecting some inner drama—I knew not what.

The house, which stands on a quiet side street, planted with lime-trees, is an old wooden Russian house, built around a court

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entered through iron gates and one of those venturesome vaulted gateways, not magnificent, but with the luxury of seclusion. I am sure it is charming under the limes in the spring. The door was opened by a manservant in livery and an irreproachable air of belonging to the best family in Petrograd. If I am not mistaken, it was Andrei, who once crawled into a bear's den at the command of his small autocrat, to find himself confronted by two fiery eyes, and who would have lost his life but for the presence of a Cossack; the same Andrei who threw himself on the ground and wept passionately upon his master's return, after the manner of the East.

The order of the house I can remember only dimly. There is a broad stairway, leading out of the entrance hall into a larger hall above lined with old portraits, a head of Pushkin and one of Lermontov and a few ingenuous busts done by a dilettante of the family; a music-room in green and birch, deliciously recalling a birch forest; a long white-and-gold *salon* with heavy glass chandeliers and yellow damask curtains; glimpses of a smaller drawing-room with eccentric birds in flight across a Chinese screen; and a library of paneled

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Russian oak. The floors everywhere are of beautifully polished wood, and quaint wooden steps, worn into hollows by generations of Novinskys, lead up and down between the rooms. Tourists would probably find it lacking in magnificence, and I would rather be drawn and quartered than expose anything so dim and tender and fragrant with human association to a vulgar gaze. It is the house in which M. Novinsky was born and I felt new doors of personality opening as we passed through the mellow rooms, with a garden framed through the French windows beyond, together with a sudden quick gratitude for this new admittance.

Mlle. Novinska came to meet me in her manner which resembles floating rather than walking, to say that her mother was awaiting me in one of the small drawing-rooms. She looked paler than the first day I saw her, wearing something blue, with a narrow line of uncut emeralds about her throat emphasizing the whiteness of her skin. I remember that a woman, who had been physician to the Empress Dowager of China, once told me that she had never once really seen the apartments to which she was commanded. Each time

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she struggled to look at the appointments of the palace in the Forbidden City; invariably she came away without the image of a single detail. Once within the Empress Dowager's presence, it was impossible to detach one's attention for a moment from the "Old Buddha." I recall only some small tapestry panels, the high-backed carved chair in which Mlle. Novinska sat—near me for my rescue, if I needed her!—and a high, wide fireplace.

Madame Novinska has been an invalid since the tragic death of her second son, and she was half-reclining as I entered. A portrait of her could be painted only in the grand manner—a face of alabaster, white hair under the ivory lace of her cap, and tense, dark eyes, thoughtful like M. Novinsky's. My first impression, among others that crowded forth, was of a woman who looked far beyond our ken. The hand she held out to me was slender and blue-veined, and offered with that indescribable mingling of graciousness and imperiousness which marks the great lady to whom homage is due and rendered. And, joy of joys, she expressed her pleasure at seeing me in English! "Ah, that is the expres-

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sion of your eyes!" she said, as she turned me to the light. How amazingly simple the real people are even in this formal Old World! It was the atmosphere of a *salon*, and the deftness with which she put the stranger at ease was nothing less than magical. Among a people old and experienced in living, it is not the least beautiful of the arts.

I find the Russian extremely sensitive to foreign culture, and the fact that his own land has so long been counted a barbarian camp has driven the aristocrat abroad until, as the fruits of his exile, he is now the cosmopolite of the world. Madame Novinska's knowledge of America and her interest in American affairs were amazing. Helen Keller, the American war policy, Burbank—perhaps a word only in passing, but laden with suggestion. Under her skilful shifting and sorting of topics one talked in spite of one's self, and all the time her eyes were registering something neither Helen Keller nor Burbank nor the American war policy. And yet I did not feel disquieted, for she gave that rare and generous assurance that the best in one would not be ignored.

"You know our interest in America is of

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long standing," smiled Mlle. Novinska. "*Ma mère* knew Washington as a girl."

"Yes, my uncle was attached to the embassy at Washington and I made a visit to your capital as a very young girl," reminisced Madame Novinska. "But I remember it as vividly as if it were yesterday—the summer nights on the Potomac and the 'darkies' singing below our windows in the dusky night. They are exceedingly picturesque, your negroes; I wonder if Americans know just how picturesque. And the tall, clean-shaven officers. I remember stealing down the curving stairway to watch the dancers in the ballroom. Of course, as a *jeune fille* I lived secluded; Russian girls are younger than your young girls. But it was a wonderful memory. Can you imagine Turgenev's Liza there? What airy delight I took in the barouches—and perhaps I might have dreamed a longer time of officers with Yankee chins had it not been for a young cousin in Russia." She glanced instinctively above the fireplace to the portrait of an officer with a slim, delicately poised head and eyes like M. Novinsky's.

"America has much to teach Russia. In spite of a certain youth in our muscles, we are

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old and weary in our consciousness. But America—America is so healthy, so strong! She has never had the 'courage of her destiny dwarfed,' as have we of Europe. She has no skeletons of human failures to strew the path. What colossal naïve unawareness, what faith, what enthusiasm! All that Europe has tried and found impossible she achieves before she hears—*that it is impossible!* Russia has a few ancient ruins and crumbling cities to remind her of man's failure, but she has many centuries of remembered chaos and insufficiency. For too many generations life for Russia has been to sit all day in a dressing-gown. The educated man has but two openings for his energy—to manage his estate and to put on the uniform of a *tchinovnik* and become another spider in the web of officialdom. There is no normal, unrestricted outlet for him, as there is in America, because everything is bound about with Government influence. And inhibition prolonged breeds sleep in the blood, and a certain confused futility. The most depressing feature of Russian autocracy has not been the visible thwarting of individual life, but the disintegration of a whole national fiber. Through disuse, the

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Russian has lost his sinew. Turgenev knew. See his Nezhdanoff struggling to act, but stumbling and falling and shooting himself under an apple-tree. All these centuries that grooves should have been laid in men's minds, there have been none. When the revolution comes, then we shall reap the harvest of all these trackless brains. Russian women are far more practical and stronger than Russian men. Ah, it is great good fortune to be born an American! I see America in the poise of your head and in your eyes. But it must come some day, our self-realization. The steppe has left us a great heritage—a belief in the brotherhood of man and the oneness of God, an immense social cohesion and a tremendous power and simplicity."

Madame Novinska spoke as one who treasures her ideals like a dream. I feel it in all of them—in Dmitri Nikolaivitch, in Mlle. Novinska, in Olga Stepanovna, in Agasha, gray and grumbling though she be—the worship of the ideal. Can they, will they, I wonder, ever embody the ideal in action?

Tea was served after half an hour by a butler descended from one of the house-serfs freed by Madame Novinska's father, an ancient

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servitor whose face, like that of Turgenev's Pistchalkin, "has set in a sort of solemn jelly of positively blatant virtue." Mlle. Novinska herself poured from a quaint old silver service with a design in bas-relief, copied from an ancient Persian tomb, which had been brought—the tea service, not the tomb—by another diplomatic ancestor who had seen long service in Persia and Turkey. And the firelight gleamed on the crested porcelain, on the fine damask inset with heavy Russian lace, and on Mlle. Novinska's thin hands.

M. Novinsky spoke little, but his eyes rested adoringly on his mother. When I said my adieus he accompanied me down the winding velvet-carpeted stairway, past the Fragonards, into the great stone-floored hall below, where the carriage waited inside the wrought-iron gates. It was indescribably charming, this bit of Old World quietude, the gabled roofs pointing against the deepening saffron sky, the court filling with dusk. The lights were beginning to come out and their pale light struggled feebly with the amethyst shadows, splashing the court with pools of black. An entirely consistent figure in this mellow background, M. Novinsky, slimly silhouetted

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against the great doors, looking down at me.

"Thank you for coming," he said.

"Please do not say you thank me." There was an inexplicable ache in my throat. "It has been a day I shall remember." I dared not look up at the face in the dusk, lean and delicate with thought and feeling.

"Pardon, *Amerikanka*, but you have been a deep pleasure to *madame, ma mère*." His voice was low, strongly Slavic in accent. "These are darker days in Russia, perhaps, than you know. You have been a thread of gold shot across our somber background. And there is also another reason." The eyes, almost electric blue even in the twilight, gazed at me with a new, strange earnestness. "I shall be leaving Petrograd—and I wanted to see you here—in this old house."

XII

A FACE AT THE BALLET

I HAVE been sitting by the French window, watching the cathedral lose itself in the dusk. Twilight is the enchanted hour in any land. How many other images surge through my mind and struggle for place! It is the Japanese Inland Sea; twisted islands sharpen from the sea-green mists, beckon and vanish again — phantoms; from the shore, lights twinkle under thatched roofs, and quaint silhouettes move against paper screens. In Kobe and Nagasaki jagged peaks, patterned like a willow-plate, cut sharply against the sky; below in the harbor, lateen-sailed junks home-bound pole quietly in among freighters and steamers and yachts and all the unsorted craft that make up a harbor in the East. There are other images: the bund at Shanghai—Shanghai, that brilliant hybrid of East and West, pouring along its gay ante-

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dinner throng. Clean, white-flanneled young Englishmen; pale, laborious Germans; Sikhs with immobile eyes, in red turbans and khaki uniforms; natives in delicate blue and lavender silks; rickshas beginning to light their long Chinese lanterns; ladies in carriages with tasseled *mafus*, and runners that scatter the crowds—all in a sensuous, heated atmosphere against the darkening blue of the Hwangho. Egypt unrolls like a frieze: black palms fringing the cooling sands of the Nile; the thin blue smoke of the evening meal curling upward from a mud-walled Arab village to an orange sky; strings of home-coming camels; women with water-pots, majestic creatures. Over all the tented silky sky and the darkling river weaving the shifting tints into a rich brocade. . . . Memories, too, of Peking: monster gates towering above the city, freighted with the mystery of North China, dwarfing even the camel-caravans that emerge from their shadows; brocaded gentlemen airing their birds on the wall in the cool of the evening; the faint, sweet plaint of the *samisen* from the lantern-lighted city below. . . . Memories all of shimmering sand and heat and tumultuous life. How incredibly different those other

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twilights from this spacious gray light of the North! Is this happiness, I wonder, that one feels in Russia? It is not a land to which one turns with song and laughter, Russia. It is like the face of Dusé—a thing of shadows, weary, wistful, poignant. But I would not surrender it, though it is pain and struggle; there is something more mysterious seeking to break through here than anywhere else in the world. In Russia I have ceased to be what I fear I have been—a person with an interest in the graceful beauty of life—and I am developing—I hope!—a soul. But it has been M. Novinsky's Russia, seen through his interpretation, through the medium of his personality. What will it be without my exquisite ambassador—my friend?

MADemoiselle,—Lend us your West-world eyes to-morrow night for the ballet. It may be my last this season and I want to see it with the old illusion.

Yours faithfully,

DMITRI NOVINSKY.

"Olga Stepanovna," I cried, when my hostess had joined the samovar, singing its little folk-song, "I shall a-balleting go!"

"Ballet!" Olga Stepanovna pronounced

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the word Russian fashion with a "t," while the samovar burred with excitement. "Ballet—*nu, golubtchik*, as I have explained to you, ballet is subsidized by the Crown, tickets are sold by *abonnement* and boxes are inherited with the estate and family jewels. It is difficult."

I put the note written in M. Novinsky's neat script into her hands.

"Ah, with the Novinskys! *Mozhno*. The Novinsky box has been in the family three generations; Madame Novinska had it from her father, old Prince Korovotsky. There is no difficulty. It is the fashion now to send one's box to the officers on leave and there will be a gay show of color. And Sunday night wear your prettiest frock, *dushenka*."

"Cricket for the Britisher and ballet for the Russian," I heard Olga Stepanovna's voice rippling on. While my eyes followed the last phrase again, "my last this season," Olga Stepanovna chattered on, volubly, screening me gratefully. "I had an aunt in Little Russia who had never seen ballet until she came to Petrograd last winter. If you could have beheld her radiance! Sixty, the mother of many sons and the child of many sorrows, but ah, the taste was in her! I heard strange

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sounds in her rooms at two in the morning, after the ballet; I pulled on a dressing-gown and slipped down the corridor. And there stood my venerable aunt before a mirror, gray and ponderous—so, *Amerikanka!* arrayed in a short petticoat, rising on her toes, pirouetting, chasséing and trying all the floatings of the gauzy *ballerinas*. She blushed a little when I came in. ‘Don’t take me for a fool, little Olga,’ she sighed. ‘It was so beautiful!’ And do you know, *milaya*, I did not take her for a fool.”

I slipped the note into its sheath. I knew that I had not yet pressed against the coldest terror of pain, and I longed desperately for something warm and human.

“Ah, *milaya*, you can never comprehend the ballet.” My godmother more than half guessed, I think, as she ran on: “In your happy America, to dance is merely to seek pleasure and, therefore, it means nothing. But in Russia, to dance is to rebel—to rebel against tyranny, against the futility of life. Do you not hear it in our music, the moaning of the wind in the forest, the lonely gray of the steppe, the terror of night, the despair? Ah, me! you do not know the steppe nor the mad

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carousals and debauch with which those shaggy giants there seek to shake it off. Wait until you hear the songs on the Volga! How they sound across the water from the rafts at night! They know and they are seeking to forget, those river boatmen—”

Little Dasha had donned a new collar and a string of red beads, and her cheeks and eyes shone as if the pumpkin coach and the mice footmen stood outside the door. No dreary hours for little Dasha these days, with Prince Charming at the door, nor for Agasha Feodorovna. Agasha summoned me a score of times to see my frock and herself set my fur galoshes before the fire. This Russian kindness—it wraps one like a Scotch plaidie in a cauld, cauld blast.

Perhaps to American eyes the Maryinsky Theater might be a bit lack-luster, but I like the sleighs fleeing past us in the white distance of the Moika, to appear again over the arched bridges of the river; the purple dome of sky, threaded with iridescent mists, bulging *izvostchiks*, dashing across the mammoth square, discharging rainbow cargoes from furry depths and making way sharply for the next bearded Jehu.

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"It isn't as brilliant as London or Paris theater-going," said M. Novinsky, gazing out of the carriage window at the white ribbon of avenue.

"But I like it—the northness and scintillation. It's more hand-made. It's Russian!"

"You are beginning to feel the charm of Russia?" M. Novinsky's eyes turned on me with serious intentness.

I catch the slantwise line of his profile, nervously incisive under the flickering lights of the carriage, his expressive smile, meditative eyes, eyes that can narrow and burn. A *mondain*, yes—but sincere, objective; a beautiful, *natural* human being. The carriage is pervaded with the faint fragrance of Russian cigarettes, so entangled for me with other memories—memories of Peking, of black nights on the steppe and filmy days along the Neva—so much of joy and pain and struggle and so much of exquisite content. We are passing the Yusuphoff Palace. I turn my eyes away for refuge in the mystery of the great iron gates. Suddenly I realize—this is what Life, with all her shifting and selecting and wearing-down process, ought to produce. Never before had I so felt the appeal of beauty

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in a human being. And now all this fineness to be lost in the gaping void of Russia's destiny? One topic lies, a dead thing, veiled, between us to-night when we are seeing ballet with the old illusion.

"Russia, like China, is a bit shabby, but she has the air of the grand dame." That is all I find courage to say.

Below the box bloomed a painter's riot of color: silver-daggersed Circassians, like kings incognito; handsome young Hussars in blue or crimson trousers; Robin Hood colonels in green. Diaghileff may bring ballet to America, but not even he can carry all this contingent color. Surely, ballet blossoms its supremely bizarre and beautiful flower only here on Russian soil.

It was not a large party; two fair-haired young officers home from the trenches, a lovely Titian-haired friend of Natalya Nikolaievna's, and a miniature aunt of the Novinskys in black velvet and diamonds.

"*Nu, Amerikanka*," said Mlle. Novinska, mistily pale in her black tulle, the row of uncut emeralds emphasizing the pallor of her skin and the lurking shadow of her eyes, as she held out her hand with a smile always a little dis-

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trait. "It is good to have you here. This is a quaint old Russian folk-tale that Dmitri and I used to watch as children from this very box with our grandmother, and we have always loved the little awkward tow-headed prince, fumbling his cap before the court beauties he had evoked, and then setting off with the little Humpbacked Horse, for the One Most Beautiful of All." Her eyes lingered for a moment on the brother whom she resembles as one thoroughbred *borzoi* resembles another.

"And why do they all stand?" I begged, gazing at the spectrum of color below. When one is American one is expected to be wide-eyed and breathless; it is one of the privileges. "Why do all those officers *magnifique* stand?"

"Since the Czar's box is here, they may be in the presence of his Majesty," explained the young officer. "And he is present sometimes with the little grand duchesses and the Empress Dowager. The Empress never comes; she is melancholy." He added the latter under his breath with an enigmatic glance at me.

"And those lovely Andalusians with the mobile eyes and sloping shoulders?" I breathed from the edge of the box.

"Armenians from Baku; after the Circas-

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sians, the most beautiful women in Europe," M. Novinsky answered, his eyes following the two I had indicated, with the same connoisseur's air he would have shown examining a jade or Meissen.

They were constantly dropping into the box, between acts, these men from the front. One could almost smell the fresh hardness of the camp about them. And the lusty delight of them to be again in the capital, and the *pot-pourri* of tongues! French, English, Russian—one never knew which the arrival would speak. The last news from the front, the freshest bit of court gossip, and the newest military scandal. Bagdad and Babel in one; life vast, quivering, momentous, with always the sense of the snows beyond there somewhere—the sound of the guns and the fate of the world hanging in the uncleared smoke—brilliant, dangerous, terrible.

It would have been intoxicating if for one moment one could have forgotten. I glanced at Mlle. Novinska. I wondered if she knew.

"Do you feel a peculiar intensity here?" a young captain of the Pavolski regiment—the regiment that four times has gone out and four times has not come back—asked me. "It is

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not simply the joy of returning. That is enough for your Englishman, but for the Russian there is another appeal—the contrast of the snowy dugouts, the terrible and violent, with this heaped and perfumed luxury; it is that the Russian loves. It stirs in him a sense of the lyric, the *extraordinaire*." And looking into his susceptible Slavic eyes, I knew that it was true. And I remembered nights on the steppe and skating under the pines.

It was the dowager who really informed me as to the ballet. What stores of knowledge I should have had, could I have listened to her! To her lively questions I answered that I spoke Russian little and badly.

"*Neetchevo*," she returned, briskly. "Keep trying! English and American speak everything badly. Do you like the ballet? Yes? Ah, but you cannot understand it! No one can comprehend who is not Russian. It is racial, this passion for the acme of the sophisticated, combined with barbaric strength. *C'est absolument Slave*. And do you realize, mademoiselle, the Russian, fickle to his other mundane loves, is amazingly faithful to his ballet favorites? That is because we worship art and not personalities. Have you seen

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Karsavina, the beautiful, the *prima ballerina* of Petrograd as Gelza is of Moscow? But you should see the house when tiny Prebyshenskaya, the grandmother of the ballet, flits across the stage. Pavlova? *Konyechno*. But we seldom see her. She returns only to put an edge to her dancing and keep her place on the pension-roll. Here she is but *one* and interests us largely because of her vogue with you. It is Kseshenska, the court favorite of twenty years ago, now the wife of a grand duke and mother of a tall son, who is the one great *ballerina* of all Russia. It is Kseshenska who sets all the ballet standards. It is Kseshenska who has the most beautiful jewels in Russia. *Elle est merveilleuse!* And she has cost the peasant more than one battle-ship!"

It was pleasant in the shadows of the capacious box, Mlle. Novinska's profile gleaming palely in the half-light and the two young officers lost in the flying harmonies. If I could have but forgotten! With most of the officers I feel that the ballet is caviare for capricious appetites, but in M. Novinsky it appeals to deeper and more subtle sensibilities. I could not see him, but I was aware of him with his arms folded, lost in the poesy of the

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rich *ensemble*, sunk deep in the melancholy of the Slav, which is not a trivial melancholy of the despair, but of man's whole impotence and impermanence. How pleasant it was, how sweet there in the dim box like a hanging balcony above the garden of color! And over it all hovered the Rimsky-Korsakov music, an accompaniment to one's dream, languidly rising, touching everything mysterious and sacred, loosing everything barbaric in one.

"Do you like it?" M. Novinsky leaned forward with his head on his hand.

"Yes," I confessed. "But I feel like a heathen at prayers, when to you each flying posture of the dancer is as distinctive as the tone of Elman or Kubelik."

"It brings a thousand other images of liquid movement. I see again horsemen silhouetted against the horizon—the bronze bodies of Chinese coolies—boats clustering down the Nile. Russian literature, I confess, depresses me sometimes; Russian dancing and music, never! They have caught all the color of the Slav and shot a new pattern through the old web of life."

I was about to reply to this sensitive Slav,

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who runs swiftly before me in every apperception of beauty, when my eye fell upon two figures who had come in and were standing in one of the boxes opposite, a general with a sharp mustache and many decorations, and a junior staff-officer, noticeable for his carriage. The words ebbed away from me. Could it be? I stared again. And the younger officer, he of the smoky-blue eyes! The younger man was clean-shaven now, but the peculiar carriage!

"Dmitri Nikolaievitch"—one instinctively lowers one's voice in Russia—"in the opposite box—the general and the other—the young officer—"

I had expected to see M. Novinsky startled, but he continued to follow his program. "Yes," he assented, without lifting his eyes in the direction in which I was staring. "It is—his Excellency." His voice had a curiously hard edge which I had never heard before. "And the other—'the servant.' It is impossible to explain now, mademoiselle, but if I may ask you to trust me—I beg a thousand pardons—you will not address the General?"

XIII

MISS AMERIKANKA KNOWS

I WAS just entering Kazan Cathedral this afternoon, to burn a taper against these troublous times, when I met M. Novinsky emerging abstractedly—like a figure in a dream. I could feel my face flush with joy, and then an icy gray flood poured through me. I had seen that look in men's faces and I knew. *I knew. I knew.*

"I have been burning a candle to my patron saint," M. Novinsky said, his smile stealing through me like healing. "Shall we turn back into the cathedral for a moment? I was just on my way to you."

I glanced again at his pale, grave face as we entered the shadowy jeweled dusk and found a niche away from the throng that ebbed and flowed through the cathedral. *I knew.* There was no need for him to speak, for his words

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could contain little that I had not already divined.

"It is true as you have surmised," he said, as calmly as if he discussed a dinner invitation. "I am going to the front, not in the usual way, but on—a special mission. It is of the utmost importance. The nature of it must remain unknown even to my sister and—I am sorry—to you, *Amerikanka*. I wanted to tell you—because there are not many chances that I shall return. *Neetchevo*. That is of trifling importance. If I accomplish my end, it will be an immense *coup d'état* for Russia. But I could not go—without thanking you—for an experience completely satisfying—such as comes to but few men—and never . . . twice in a lifetime."

He spoke slightly formally, as if he had thought it all out carefully, controlled. His voice, strongly Slavic, died away as the music poured about us in a whirling flood. It was Rachmaninoff's Mass for the Dead. . . . I leaned against the foot of an ikon, struggling with the desolate gray sea which threatened to engulf me, while the music languished and moaned among the somber spaces.

"*Shto dyelatch?*" M. Novinsky asked, in his quiet, un-English voice, looking down at me

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while the light from silver candelabra fell on his smooth, dark head and the music ebbed about the shadowy pillars. "It is the common fate and the common sacrifice. But it is not pain. I had feared to lose my chance, and now it has come—the opportunity to serve Russia. Except for—my mother, I am indescribably happy. It is magnificent harmony—to be caught up in the whole, thrown into the current, living not one, but a hundred million lives. This is what life ought to mean—concerted effort." His eyes bore the same quiet mysticism they had shown that night as we watched the cathedral in the oncoming dusk, and a certain luminous release with which sacrifice sets her men apart.

I found my voice coming as from a dim distance. "I know—I can guess." I faltered. "But not our"—I could not bring myself to frame the General's name.

"I did not know you were aware." M. Novinsky turned a penetrating glance on me. "Yes"—he dropped down on a stone bench in the niche, resting his head on his hands—"he, too. It is all part of an enormous plot. I have known ever since I came to Petrograd.

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Three factories have gone over into German hands—and without ammunition it means slaughter for the men at the front. Yes, he, too. That is why I asked you not to see him last night at the opera. I wanted to spare you that memory. I could not bear—in after years—” The plastic figure with his back bowed in the half-light did not finish, but I knew.

The chant had ebbed and died and the glory of the priestly vestments had passed into the tenebrous chancel. An old peasant bundle of rags lay at the foot of an ikon, clasping the feet of the Christ. We came slowly out and stood for a moment together in the shadows, M. Novinsky with his arms folded, I struggling with my loneliness, like figures in some ancient Greek drama looking up at the giant pillars dwarfing our two pigmy figures with pity and fear. Above shone the stars as they had shone in Siberia—as they shone on my West there across the sea—as they shone now on those snow-dunes there in the fantastic white night.

Olga Stepanovna has taken me with her many times these days, silently protecting, as

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best she may, this godchild whose feet are set in paths of pain.

One of Olga Stepanovna's friends is a queen and we have been shopping to-day for church brocades with which to bind a volume of poems for her Royal Highness. The brocades are rarely beautiful, richer than the brocades of China or Japan, but difficult to buy. The Japanese has no hesitation in selling his sacramental robes, but the Russian neither wears the cross as a decoration nor traffics in his priestly vestments. Perhaps we search for laces among the peasant craft-shops while the old woman runs on about the famine of 1905 and the great Tolstoi's aiding the peasants, helping them to pick up again the old folk-patterns and to improve their work. Or perhaps we take a swift sleigh to the islands beyond the Neva, where at a little café Olga Stepanovna orders a luncheon for me, purely Russian. There are little meat pies and a soup in each plate of which floats a hard-boiled egg—whether for refreshment or divertisement I never discovered. But it is of no use. It is as Dmitri Nikolaivitch's city I have seen Petrograd and it will always be his city. Yesterday he was; to-day he is not; to-morrow—?

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It's snowing in Petrograd to-day. A Russian snow. There has been a victory, too. One sentence by wireless, and the city is flung into pæans of rejoicing. If you wish Russian opera, here it is—the opening chorus. The streets are thronged with multitudes tramping bareheaded through the snow, the ikons borne aloft on their shoulders, Slavic fire kindling through Slavic languor; and as they tramp they sing strange Slavic rhythms. Tramp, tramp—the cathedral squares are filling, and the place before the Winter Palace is lit with impassioned faces. The Slavic melody breaks into wilder, stronger rhythms, and above all float the Double Eagles of Russia in the whirling, whitening snow. How quickly they flare up, these children of Russia, and as swiftly die down. You ask whether Russians love Russia. The reverential *babas* and *iz-vostchiks* answer to-day. It is the soul of Russia singing her high song.

I had stood silent while the soldiers' chorus passed. As the song died away in the muffled distance toward the Winter Palace, came another sound of slow drums and the Chopin *Marche Funèbre*. Out of the white distance down the Litenyie slowly wound a cortège, a

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gun-carriage stripped and drawn by artillery horses ridden by war-worn soldiers; a riderless horse following the still figure, pricking his ears at the empty, useless stirrups; then three officers in long belted coats; a white carriage filled with flowers; and other veiled and shrouded women's figures walking slowly. That weary, weary walking through the snow—that intimate last camaraderie which the Russian rich and poor alike pay their dead! A somber pageant under the pall of that *Marche* played with the curious Russian rhythm, sadder than any other rhythm in the world.

"*Matushka*, an officer—do you know who?" I touched a shawled *baba* who stood near me while the crowd watched silently with bared heads. A sudden breathless pain rushed through me at that moment when her wrinkled lips framed the name. How silently, unannounced, tragedy stands at the door!

His image was still before me as he stood before the fire and talked of Russia that night on the islands under the pine, his magnificent Turgenev head and shoulders outlined against the paneling. He had come to say farewell before he went to the front, the

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tall Muscovite, Dmitri Nikolaivitch's comrade, who had not feared to meet his destiny of pain. And now his viking length of limb had passed on the gun-carriage. I crossed myself with the broad Russian cross as the cortège wound into the mists. So falls the curtain of life—or does it open there—somewhere—in a dazzling radiance? I wondered, as I had wondered a thousand times since I stood with M. Novinsky that night amid the shadows of the cathedral.

“Was he one of yours, *milaya*?” The old woman turned to me with patiently dumb eyes.

“Yes, *matushka*,” I faltered.

From the further whiteness the dirge drifted back—slow and sad—with indefatigable Slavic sadness.

“*Gospode tebye, milaya.*” The old mother laid a shawled arm about me while I sobbed quietly with the incomprehensibility of it all. “I have lost five sons in the war. It is too much sorrow even for women.”

XIV

A MENTAL BREAD-LINE

I AM too restless to read, these days. To walk endlessly in the snow—it is the only way to forget the obscurity out there into which men drop.

To-day I found myself in Vassily Ostrov. It was not without trepidation that I passed a sleepy *dvornik* and through an arched doorway into the courtyard of what seemed a colossal apartment-house. I entered such a courtyard last week. It was the right number, but when I adventurously opened one of the doors on a chance, the room was filled with startled dark-looking men, one of whom came quickly forward to meet the intruder.

The snow was melting in puddles and the eaves pelted me with drops as I picked my way through the slush. It recalled the court in Gorky's *Twenty-six Men and a Girl* and I half expected to see the girl crossing the court,

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her skirts held neatly above trim ankles, to meet the baker with fine golden hair on his forearm. I steered my way between puddles to the only door visible, an unlikely-looking one opposite the entrance. A mutely humble woman opened the door, removed my fur galoshes and hung up my *shuba* in a row of other fur coats with a manner that could not exist with us any more than could an English butler's face. It was the women's university.

I don't know what I expected to see—a short-haired committee discussing bombs, perhaps. At any rate, the atmosphere was very different. Not for an instant could one have held the illusion that one had dropped into an American university. As I wandered up the stairway I began to be inundated by crowds of Russian university girls, and to breathe more deeply that atmosphere so amazingly different. Arnold Bennett called our education a pageant, and he might have added, "through which the youth of America walk like young gods." If Arnold Bennett were in Russia he would call education a bread-line.

My guide was a junior from Rostov who had been twice in England and who spoke a su-

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perior English. She was not one of your pink-and-white English beauties, but she was amazingly magnetic, her face typically Russian, broad like a Tartar's across the cheekbone, and without definitive line or color. Her hair, tawny as a Cossack's, but fine and thick, she wore cut short like an early Italian or a child, and continually tossed it out of her eyes with what seemed to me an infinity of patience. In Solomon's time her throat would have been celebrated in song, so like a tower of ivory, so firm, so clearly marked with the necklace of beauty that it tempted the fingers like a piece of sculpture.

We sat down in the assembly-room while the girls promenaded by twos around the room, and she talked in a low voice that came well from the ivory throat. The more she talked the more I found myself liking to look at her; I kept recalling, too, Henry James's description of Turgenev in Daudet's *salon* in Paris. As the *confrères* of Turgenev in the *exploité* atmosphere of Paris saw beyond him the gray horizon of Russia, so beyond my friend from Rostov I saw the mysterious steppe. She was carrying a beautifully bound Petrarch and she told me that she read Italian.

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Perhaps it was to the collector's joy in me she contributed, since I had found in her, it seemed to me, that blend of culture with Titan strength that has so bound me to the Russian people.

The other girls were different. They come from the four corners of Great Russia, my guide told me—from the Caucasus and the Urals and from those stretches trans-Baikal. The university, not in the least paternal or patriarchal, makes no provision for their housing, and the result is a four-in-a-room, cooking-over-a-gas-jet arrangement, which tells its own haphazard tale in anemic faces and old bodies. It is Latin Quartier life, but *à la Russe*, which means, perhaps, less light-heartedness than in Paris, to pass it off under gray Russian skies, and fewer mustard-café where a gay meal and red wine may be had for a franc. Humanity *en masse*, especially strange humanity, is not beautiful, and I found myself hunting almost distractedly among the dull-haired, dingily fair girls for even one fresh-faced, clear-eyed figure. There was only one, and when I found her she stood out like a poster.

But the hunger and thirst of those faces! Whatever else slips through memory's fingers,

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it will not be that. I will not say that the American student is not eager; he may be, but he is not starving intellectually, and such appetite as he has he takes philosophically. One can, if his appetite does not gnaw and if he knows that nine-tenths of those who come will not find a closed door and an empty bowl. But I agree to what a Russian Jewish tailor in America once said to me, that a Russian boy at sixteen has more intellectual curiosity than an American college graduate. My friend from Rostov tells me, however, that their system follows too much of the Oriental system of rote and leads to suicide rather than to success. She would have more of applied science and more technical schools. And doubtless she is right.

There was no sign of revolutionists, although the university is a notorious hotbed and often closed for months at a time by order of the Government. But once I glimpsed something of the hidden fire that must kindle at the bottom of all revolutionary movements. At the end of the second lecture a wisp of a girl came forward to beg hospital funds. She was a revolutionary type, with burning, dark eyes and a voice with a thrilling undercurrent

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of appeal. The effect was instantaneous! The margin of these students is for the most part the *kopek*, hardly more than the marginal tenth of a *cash* in China, but there was no question of means, only the profound Russian response to need—the Russian always, as Merezhkovski points out, flying where we walk, mad where we are sane, seeking not to save, but always to lose himself! And this is the stuff of which revolutions in Russia, of which Russia herself, are made!

It is Easter—the Easter that M. Novinsky told me of, that night, watching the cathedral. Last year it fell in Japan where the shadows of the cryptomeria brighten with the yellow of the pilgrims' garbs and the temple bells call tranquilly across the little valleys; and once in Rome I watched the devout on their knees ascend the weary Via Dolorosa. But this Easter promises to linger longest of all; at least it is the only Easter memory I have of returning in a ball-gown at four in the morning!

Not a theater nor an opera open; even the play-bills are torn down, as reminiscent of the devils of the world; the sweets are made with honey, "God's sugar," but for the last three

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days only crusts of bread and water have passed our lips. And how the women wailed when the body of the Christ was borne into the center of the cathedral! I confess to thinking that the pagan in me likes the pageantry of priesthood in black velvet and silver and all the splendid ecclesiastical panoply of grief. But to-day the pall has lifted, the shadows fled. To-day is Easter! The priests have burst from their black-and-silver chrysalides into full iridescent glory. "*Christos Voskresen!*" and the bells from all the golden cupolas are ringing, not as Japanese temple bells across a quiet valley, but with Slavic ecstasy.

Last night was a night to be remembered. How I wished for M. Novinsky, to see the loveliest sight in all Russia! I was just crossing the snowy square in front of St. Isaac's, returning from the last Mass before the midnight Easter service, when suddenly were the gates of fairyland flung open. Down the aisle of columns, out from among the dusky pillars of the great cathedral, in twos and threes—or sometimes alone, a voluminous shawled and aproned *nyanya* in the background—came figures, gravely intent little figures,

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each carefully shielding his candle with tiny cupped hands or twists of white paper, the yellow candle-light flaring up into faces as cherubic as Reynolds's "Age of Innocence," but weighted with all the sweet solemnity of Miltonic angels: children bearing home sacred candles lighted at the altar for their own Lares and Penates. Out from among the inscrutable shadows and down the steps of the vast cathedral they flickered and floated in twos and threes, and still farther down the cañons of the dark streets, the spirit lights wavering and gleaming like myriad will-o'-the-wisps, phantom ships floating on a phantom tide. It reminded me of nothing so much as of that night of ancestor worship in the East, when lotus lanterns burning for the dead are set afloat on river and bay and far out to sea.

The streets were ablaze with illuminations, the hotels in red and blue, the embassies great galleries of light, the coronets of the old aristocratic houses along the Neva glowing above the gateways, and the torches of the cathedral angels streaming triumphantly against the midnight sky. The cathedral square was packed with humanity, but the

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cathedral itself lay, as always, inaccessible among its shadows.

Suddenly the giant doors were flung open as if by some supernal impulse, and a mighty flood of light and music poured out into the night; from the heart of the radiant flood emerged a processional of gold-and-silvery-raimented priests, with tapers aloft, crosses agleam with jewels, the light falling superbly on miter and crown, on cross and diadem. Slow-wandering through the snowy night, solemn, stately, flowed the iridescent stream under the Northern velvet sky, banners and crosses borne high, tapers gleaming in the darkness—a fantastic arabesque—searching the night for the Christ. I looked and lingered, and still I lingered while the chants searched among the night winds.

Inside the multitudes waited with the silence of death, every face turned toward the portal with intense expectation. And again the great doors flung open for the processional returning. Now the strain rose triumphant, "*Christos Voskresen! Christos Voskresen!*" ("Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen!") as down the aisle swept the radiant, silvery stream of figures—while from

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the hosts there rose the mighty incense of adoration.

We had seats near the altar in the gold-laced diplomatic section, but I was more content to stand in the great nave. The woman next me was in a ball-gown; on the other side of the ikon knelt a shawled figure, but every face was alike exalted. And then occurred that wonderful moment in the Russian service when the Metropolitan advances to a dais in the center of the nave and proclaims to the waiting hosts that "Christ is risen." Instantly and joyously the people turn to one another, falling upon one another's shoulders, peasant and noble alike exchanging the holy kiss of brotherhood. For one moment the flood-gates of heaven are opened and a new joy is let down into the world. A moment exquisitely Russian!

I had not felt sure that my brotherly love would stand the crisis of a bearded salutation, but the old *baba* on the other side of the ikon had evidently been regarding with pity my unkissed state, and I suddenly felt myself in a shawled embrace. Mlle. Novinska kissed me on the other cheek and I, too, emerged a brother to all mankind!

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I glanced at Natalya Nikolaievna as we turned to leave. Her eyes were soft and bright and as if by one impulse we bought candles at the door and lighted them in the great silver candelabra—for Dmitri Nikolai-vitch. Perhaps I am a ritualist. How else explain the inexpressible comfort of remembering that little taper burning there among the shadows of the Old World cathedral?

And then we went away to break our fast on *pasha*, a sweet, delicious cheese, *kuleetch*, hard-boiled eggs and ham, and strange *recherché* delicacies. The Novinskys were entertaining a brilliant supper-party, the men in uniform and the women in evening dress, the whole animated and Russian.

When we passed home the angels on the cathedrals had extinguished their torches and the streets were hollow and dark. But the archangels themselves could never dim for me the wonderful memory. I sat meditating long on brotherly love and the many things that Russia has laid deep in my spirit.

The days are lengthening up here in the North at the top of the world; the light grows warmer and longer. Children are beginning

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to shout at play in the sunny courtyards and the boy who skates over our floors to polish them came to-day in a Cossack blouse without a *shuba*. My pastel streets look as if they had been dropped into the Mississippi or the Yangtse, all the evanescent grays and whites vanished in a night. Alas and alack! for the fleetingness of beauty! Alas and alack! for the fleetingness of life, too! No message out of the emptiness, and Natalya Nikolaievna lives in an abstraction from which it is difficult to withdraw her.

I sometimes wonder why the fates wove Dmitri Nikolaievitch into the pattern of my days. There is in me that utterly-vanished-from-the-earth sense, such as hangs over the great Mongolian plain.

For me the first breath of spring, that peculiar smell of black earth, which Turgenev sings so triumphantly, has brought a sadness that I never felt in the crispy winter days—at least not at all in the sparkling winter nights. Now I feel Russia not ancient, but *old*, melancholy. Nowhere in the world does the pulse beat so high or the tides of life ebb so low as here; nowhere an equal abandon, nowhere that deadliest ennui, *skuchno*. As I wander

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aimlessly under the gnarled lime-trees along the canals, in front of the yellow stucco houses that have lined these canals for two hundred years—aristocratic old houses, some of them, softly Italian in coloring, but staring pathetically in their dotage and haunted by centuries of ghosts—all life seems inexplicably suffused with pathos. I have lost all the major notes and I hear only the minors. It is the reverse of the shield, this mild melancholy—the sad twin of Slavic abandon.

In the Neva alone I feel joy and adventure. It is still frozen, but every day I can feel it tugging at its bonds. Some day, they tell me, the ice will break with a crash and a boom and the river will rush away to her lover, the sea, leaving a wake of open waters, while the banks line themselves with humanity to cheer her *en voyage*. There is a chord in these morbid giants that responds to this torrential power. I remember old Gordyeev in Gorky's novel, watching the ice crush his steamers on the Volga and roaring with a sort of Titanic delight:

Give it to her—now—again—squeeze—crush!
Come once more now—*r-r-rui!* See how the Volga is working! It's robust—hey? Mother Volga can rend the whole world apart as one cuts curds with a knife!

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As I lean over the Troitski bridge I can see
far down the river the black hulks of boats
that checker the white spaces of the Neva,
feeling the stir of life—like great birds eager to
lift their wings and put out to the open sea.

I must go down to the seas again, for
The call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that
May not be denied;

I must go down to the seas again, to
The vagrant gipsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where
The wind's like a whetted knife.

I have said farewell to Olga Stepanovna
and Agasha Feodorovna, to Dasha and Sasha
and Dolly, and brought the script and bowl
of my soul to the Volga. The Novinskys I
shall see again at their summer place in Tver.
Perhaps it was the boats in the Neva, per-
haps it was "time to make a pilgrimage,"
perhaps it was—who knows? There was a
softness of spring in the air in Petrograd and
the promise of open canals, but I beat my
wings against the bars for open spaces. With-
out my exquisite ambassador I had lost the
key to Russia in Petrograd; perhaps I shall
find it here again with brawny, wide-skied
Mother Volga.

XV

MOTHER VOLGA

TO make the whole journey on this ancient Russian whale path, still the highway of romance through the plain, one should float from Rybnisk far to the south, to Astrakhan, where the faces that line the sun-baked earth broaden into the Tartar, and the river, spreading over the pale sand, merges with the sea. Below Nizhni and Kazan, however, the Russians tell me there is but a variety of monotonies. These are the names with which to conjure, these of the middle Volga, and the sound is like their own cathedral bells—Yaroslov, Kostroma, NizhniNovgorod, Kazan. This is Holy Russia, black-earth Russia; the Russia that Turgenev and Tolstoi and Tchekov and Pushkin and Lermontov and Gogol loved. “Nizhni Novgorod, Kostroma, the Volga! Ah, there is the heart of Russia!” your Slav will murmur, looking beyond you

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with a mystical smile. Red-shirted giants were loading black barges this morning when I left Rybinsk. I am bound for Nizhni Novgorod, but I should be content to drift south with the rafts to Astrakhan, *dolce far niente*.

Agasha has so filled my imagination with epic tales of the whale path that it is a painful anachronism to take other than a sail in the silver wake of the heroes! But a steamer it is—there are few sails on the Volga—and that not differing greatly from a Mississippi boat other than by an adventurous run of bizarre and delicious food. I curl up in the bow, content to watch the broad, pale stream moving majestically out to sea. The human element is picturesque enough; not the first deck—that is as sparsely inhabited as the shores we pass—but the steerage, which shows fine patriarchal beards blowing in the winds, caftaned backs and crude faces, half *méchant*, half submissive. Great Russians stolidly view the mystery of this northland; gay Little Russians coquette, the memory of sunny hills and vineyards in their faces; there are two Kalmyks “infra-human in their ugliness,” a group of Tartars in fur caps and *khalatis*, each carrying a strip

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for prayers and furnishing an animated half-hour at sunset. An agitated business, being a Mohammedan on so winding a stream as the Volga! The only really outstanding feature is the smell of disinfectants, the aftermath of the typhus which a few weeks ago scourged the river with a fierceness that should suggest to a cautious traveler the wisdom of weighing the Volga against a trip with Charon!

The gulls sweep and flash about the steamer, the silver path beckons mysteriously on; in the west the sun is shining. It is a scene from a shield! And then one by one the gulls drop back, white flecks in the blue; the barges and the red-shirted giants fade in the perspective. A day of steppe and the feel of Siberia is submerging me. Monotony—but is not monotony the test of one's response, not only to this river of the steppe, but to Russia? In the Russian plain there lies a beauty of great spaces, but little of dramatic quality, neither that of Mongolia rushing swiftly to the north nor Siberia, epic in its waste. When the world was young, one might have looked to the horizon for mysterious figures of horsemen fleetly appearing and disappearing, but these swift horsemen lie now with Kublai Khan.

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The Russian plain is the level of life itself, that level portrayed by Tchekov in the *Three Sisters* and sung in every mourning peasant cadence, without plan, prologue, epilogue, or climax—to the Anglo-Saxon, with little zest for the inner adventure, the cruelest enigma in life.

This is not to record that the fabric of the plain is wholly without design, but the design is repeated end on end, like the chorus of a peasant melody. Pines point a sky wide and compassionate, or little maiden birches courtesy in the breeze. A peasant plows the black earth, his caftan streaming behind him like the beard of a prophet, Riepin's Tolstoi. A turn in the highway, the green roofs and golden domes of a monastery thrust their aerial arabesque above the dark band of the trees. The Volga is essentially Holy Russia and these quaint symbols frequently repeated become the Volga *motif*. Like Tibetan lamaseries, they shelter hundreds of monks. We have pilgrim seekers of their shrines on our boat—ragged anchoritish figures, feet bound in *lapti*, staff in hand; less picturesque than the Chinese pilgrims in yellow brightening the approaches to the Buddhistic shrines, but

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gray, with the charm of things of eld. They have heard of a holy man to the north and they have come from beyond the Caspian to seek him. And thus is perpetuated the mystic Slavic quest for God!

I have been exploring the lower deck and making friends among the fish-casks. In the gloom of the sleeping shelves it is difficult to differentiate between bundled goods and bundled *babas* in felt boots and rags, but in the sunshine of the decks the springs of life bubble up not yet dry, and wrinkled faces peer up, canny but friendly, from the layers of shawls. It is night that evokes the Slavonic soul. When dusk has drawn her gray curtains and lighted the low-hanging stars on the plain, mystery burns up from the Russian like incense. The peasant girls who stand about in the day, arms intertwined, dance as Russians dance, with head, shoulders, eyes, trailing their kerchiefs, striking the decks with their hands, stamping with bare feet. Coquetry never learned under a roof, a primitive gambol far removed from the artificial elegancies of the ballet, and yet, root and branch, Russian dancing. Last night an old crone, who

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squatted at the side, threw off her ragged shawls, a Salome unveiling, and cleared the floor. A worthless generation of dancers! She herself showed me the polka, flinging her gaunt arms, stamping her heavy boots, tossing her toothless head. Zest? How I longed to confound the General with her! It is only when I depart, however, and leave them to the bundles and fish-casks, that they pour out their whole hearts in brooding songs—songs sometimes answered from the rafts. An abandon of grief that delights a Slav!

Sometimes I make my way up the broad, cobbled streets to the dusky monastery interiors. The Russian service is hauntingly beautiful. I could return again and again to its strange hieratic splendor with a sense of something far deeper than liturgical satisfaction if it were not for other memories! But those other memories—of Russian priests! Within a side-chapel a group of pilgrims are touching their foreheads to the floor and weeping in an ecstasy of adoration before the Mother of God. I stand silent, a trifle awed. But the priest is victim of no such sentimentality; the adoration of peasants is a too familiar phenomenon. Authoritatively he en-

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ters in his heavy black garments and evicts the weeping but unprotesting body *en masse* from the sanctuary; and then turning graciously, he invites a heterodox *Amerikanka* to rest her eyes on the bones of the saints—worldly eyes, far more concerned with the wondrousness of wrought-silver casket than had been the peasants who now weep outside.

Sometimes I reach only the monastery gates under the silvery birches, where holy men sit as inevitably as crows perch on the golden crosses above. I usually lighten my purse, but the Russian beggar shares the languor of his race and, competing with an Italian or Chinese, would bear an empty bowl.

I am the only foreigner on the boat. Yesterday I discovered my social status and it is not a matter to boast of! The discovery came through a country landowner and his wife. The *barin* is a melancholy-faced giant dressed in tall black boots, bloomers of gray alpaca, a smock, also of gray alpaca, which breaks into a full skirt at the back, giving him an appearance of a sulky but unrepentant child. With the *barina* nature had been decidedly slack; Tartar in type, but hastily done

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with broad strokes and illy defined as to line and color. She wears a white blouse the buttons of which gaily shirk their duty at the back. Food comes and goes with them like ammunition for a machine-gun: soup *solyanka*, *ryabtchiks*, caviare, mushrooms. And still they eat stolidly, imperturbably, occasionally eying me with the perplexed sorrow of the Slav. Yesterday, suddenly, with a tingling shock, it came to me—they had mistaken me for a German! After a hasty reconnaissance I made a friendly onslaught upon the steward in Russian. The landowners pushed back their chairs. They left their mushrooms. *Proshchaiete!* A thousand pardons and a glass of *kvass!* And would I do them the imperishable honor to visit them on their estate in Tambov? An anarchistic young man who had eyed me violently begged a passionate pardon, and a waiter wiped his eyes contritely in a corner. The sensitive heart of Russia!

Now that the *barina* and I have exchanged civilities we sometimes explore the booths together. Unpicturesque as she is on the steamer—patterned after Mother Volga herself, subject for Bogdanov-Belsky or Zorn—

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she is not displeasing against the background of the bazars. Yesterday was a purely secular day; no monasteries, but we found a turquoise-studded belt of ancient workmanship and a beaten-silver bowl, set with the coin of Catherine the Great. Troikas seldom come into the squares, the war having taken toll of the smart third horse that gallops at the side. The peasant of the river town, where the echoes of the world are heard, has laid aside his beautiful peasant embroideries, too, and wears products of the loom that justify a protest against the commercialization of Russia. And yet the scene may not be mistaken for other than Slavic—lounging haphazard figures with smoldering or dazed or dreamy eyes—all moving over broad flags under wide arcades—so like an opera chorus, that I am only amazed that the director does not order my Anglo-Saxon figure off stage!

It was in the great square of Yurievets yesterday that one of those tragic fragments of life, sometimes cast up like driftwood, was flung at my feet. Why the memory should persist I know no reason except, perhaps, a sensitized moment of insight into reality or

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that strange chance that fixes forever a face seen in the parting of a crowd. A Cossack's leave-taking it was, a million times repeated this spring. That was all. But it was more—symbol of woman's ancient and inarticulate grief. The soldier himself, a mighty-bodied young fellow, was visibly moved; he openly wiped his eyes on his coarse brown sleeve, while under both arms he clutched absurdly at two enormous loaves of black bread; a child in the mother's arms fluttered small, ineffectual hands in the direction of the steamer. But the silence of that Tartar-cheeked woman of the North! She wept neither "*ai, ai*" nor "*oi, oi*"; neither touched her man in farewell nor seemed to know any of those small caresses by which we seek to mitigate our grief. The sullen monotony of the North had laid its finger on her; only her eyes showed her terror, following her mate with the unreasoning grief of the jungle-sprung. As the steamer moved slowly out into the gray dusk of the evening I fancied I could see her face straining through the mists like an archaic mask of despair.

These sturdy, patient women—unconscious vessels of that black-earth force which is

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Russia! The steamer calls at only the larger towns, but we often pass the villages edging out of the forest or lodged between the folds of green, wide-streeted, wide-timbered, sprung from the earth like mushrooms or lichens. In the fields women are plowing, uncouth figures from whose broad loins have emerged those multitudinous armies which swarm myriad-wise across the plain. And still they bring them forth. Men and bread! Bread and men! It is well that mother earth teaches patience.

The river is an endless rosary, strung with days as alike as the white towns and all laden with a sense of life, sluggish and primal. The scent of pines, of new-mown hay, of drying nets, and the fragrance of lilacs. Brawny sailors in red and blue shirts shout and splash one another with water as they scrub the decks; grain-steamers whistle; hammers sound from barges building along the shore; anchor chains rattle as we drop into the wharf where fishermen are unloading their shining catch. A robust river life, not unfamiliar in essentials, but transposed into strange keys and staged on a magnificent scale. Near Astrakhan the

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river teems with life as at Canton, but here all is of the sky and the plain.

The rafts are the most Russian craft we meet, piles of yellow logs as delicious-looking as taffy, bound together with withy young saplings, each raft bearing its tiny hut for the families who make the journey with the rafts, weeks and even months *en voyage* to the sea; people with rollicking figures balancing themselves with long poles and laughing and shouting unintelligible cries to us as the steamer surge threatens their footholds. The trackers we never see, *burlaki*, muscles knotting in their hairy throats, thews straining like the haunches of horses against the dead weight of the barges, men of herculean strength—as Ryepin has painted them—leashed to the river under the lash of the *burlaki* driver. They have passed with the passing of the sails on the Volga; only occasionally a boat must be towed up-river. But the other figures—on the rafts, in the fishing-boats, driving along the edge of the forest—are their brothers. One hundred and eighty million of these faces crude and filmed with ignorance, freshly emerged from the black mold! Can these be the units of a republic? Again that varie-

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gated tide streaming westward in Siberia engulfs me. "Russia needs something of a strong hand—but there is a chance for freedom, too."

Kostroma at sunset—an ancient Stamboul, lying high above the river! Russia by day, but by night Haroun-al-Raschid's own city. With the passing of day all the cities along the Volga become less Russian and more Oriental, darkness eliminating the detail and leaving them to cut the sky like giant cardboard silhouettes. It is past sunset when we sight the domes and minarets of Kostroma, but a tent of orange and purple hangs in the sky. Below the great ramparts the river flows, a nocturnal mystery. On our monstrous steamer pushes, past caravans of barges and lighted steamers, under an arched and jeweled bridge, which casts its reflection on the tugs and sets myriad-million balloons of light afloat on the murky water below. The anchor chains rattle, the bearded saints shout and bawl; but I am little conscious of the flare of light and of noise in the ship—only of the cascade of minarets above us, a giant-starred citadel, climbing up, up into the sky! What

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Oriental whimsicalities of outline lying there above the mighty river! It is to wish not for the artists who line the *salons* with harsh wintry sketches, but for Vereschagin, with the magic caught in Japanese temple interiors and the courts of Indian rajahs, to paint night in this Oriental Russia.

Our mission at Kostroma, however, is not Oriental, but purely Russian. We are landing one of the great bells for which the city is famous. From the pier, under the streaming torches, a hushed medley of faces gazes up at us reverently. We might, indeed, be the Lohengrin ship. There are a few caftaned passengers to depart with their bundled goods, and then a gangway is cleared across the pier and through the cavernous shadows of the warehouse. Around the bell are cast cables, slipping far down on its sides bronze under the torches, and around its graven base. And then forty men, twenty on a side, throw themselves at the ropes with rhythmical cries and a sort of religious ecstasy. Perhaps it is an act of devotion to land so monstrous a bell! And, trampling and straining, they chant a broken rhythm that catches at one's pulses, and draw the bell from the deck and across the

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landing, their voices returning faintly from the warehouse like the voices of a retreating opera chorus. There is a vigorous harmony in its concerted human effort, like that of the rhythmically reaching arms and backs of "The Gleaners." The apotheosis of labor! And for a moment I caught the vision of Russia united in a mighty brotherhood.

For all the robust daylight life, the memory of night on the Volga lingers most Russian and ineffaceable. There is none of the rehearsed picturesqueness of the Nile, *dayabeahs* clustering like giant butterflies nor lateen sails hastening down the dusky river, but night unique, to be remembered when more theatrical memories have passed. Sunset is splendid, the sky hung with shifting tints—as if all the bazars of the East were tenting there. Nor does the glory leap up for a moment and then pale into a fleeting and evanescent aftermath, as on the Nile, but deepens and darkles steadily, magnificently, into the velvety blackness of night. The shore merges with the plain and the whole takes on the immensity of the sea. The water, thick, black, and buoyant, reflects the stars like fringed daisies.

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The sky is withdrawn to greater depth, and across sky and river and steppe is written a new and poignant mystery. A steamer swings out from a bend in the river like "a lighted basilica" and blazes its way down the trail, its funnels staring back like eyes from the darkness; barges emerge, slow-sailed and ponderous, their bulky shapes blocked heavily against the curtain of night, spars rocking softly under the starlit heavens—a silent nocturnal pageant. There are other shapes imminent there in the darkness—gray forms, dim and indistinct, barely discernible among the uncouth shadows of the river—rafts floating, drifting there in the unknown, riding the swell of the steamer, jostling one another in the eddying current—infinitesimal points of life pitted against the menace of night and the river. It is not difficult to project oneself there, to see the mists from the steppe inclosing them like walls reaching to the sky, and eyes that "slumber not nor sleep" peering through the fog—the fog soundless except for the lapping of the water. Muscles are taut to pole the unwieldy masses from the jutting banks or to turn them from sudden death in the path of the towering steamers. From across the water,

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at the edge of the rafts, tiny brushwood fires are twinkling like autumn fires, calling to us that there are brothers there in the void. Sometimes sounds of a carousal float on the night wind, a debauch of hairy giants rebelling against the level of life and the steppe. Again silence. A single voice threads out of the darkness, wails out a despairing lament to the stars, and sinks back into the void. Silence! I know of nothing by which the sense of the whole submerged and despairing life of Russia so passes into the soul as by these cries from the heart of the river.

Nizhni Novgorod. Even here in the Near East the name bears an aromatic flavor. A Slavic Scheherazade, teasing away time for an ennuied *knyaz*, must have told him tales of this city whose gates so often heard the battering-rams of the rival khans of Kazan, and I dare say the potentate was vastly entertained. The great fair does not open until August, but even now there is an odor and feel, an inexplicable suggestion of the bazars. The streets lie in the morning sunshine like a huge deserted stage, ready to quicken into life. Whimsical golden domes, fantastic open booths, official white houses square and bare

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as bird-cages, twisted and curling spires of milk-white, apple-green, and sky-blue—a grotesquerie of color, a motley of East and West such as one sees nowhere outside of Russia. For ten months Nizhni is a desert city; for two, a European capital. A month more, the wide-girthed hotel-keeper tells me, and preparations will begin. Beggars will be evicted from their winter quarters; booths and awnings will spring up overnight like *yagodi*; by every train wares will pour in from Moscow and Petrograd, Paris and Vienna. Barges will anchor at the wharves, laden with wood, tallow, and skins, while from the East will loom the caravans bearing apricots and oils, skins, furs, and wools; hircine Kirghiz, Kalmuks, Georgians, turbaned Persians—all to barter in the tongues of Babel.

The boat, being Russian, deposited us on the wrong shore of the river, but, approaching the ferry, I could see banks rising dark and rampartwise, and crowned with gleaming apocalyptic domes and spires. Below on the plain the Volga stretched, a gigantic blue “Y,” the two prongs pointing to the Arctic Sea, and the main river leading sluggishly southward to the Caspian. With this sight of the Volga,

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Turgenev's tribute to the Russian language ran through my memory: "Oh, thou great, mighty, powerful and free—!" A fit apostrophe, too, for this great Russian river. Both sides of the river below the crotch of the Y were stippled with golden spires and domes and the west bank was dotted with river craft, hulking black barges, mammoth white lumber-steamers, and strings of yellow rafts, not a fleet shape among them, but all broad and robust, like Mother Volga herself.

The ferry was almost equally divided between *mujiks* and little brown calves, the latter not less quiet than the peasants who stood bareheaded in the morning sun, silently crossing themselves with the broad Russian cross.

It is a mid-Russian morning, somnolent and blue; the Volga, deep-breasted, mirrors a sky not luminous as the Japanese heavens nor inscrutable as the intense blue of Egypt, but near, kind, and compassionate. Whether it is the tranquillity of the morning or the peasants crossing themselves, I do not know; I feel myself laved and sunk in peace. A personality, many personalities before this one, steals back from the past. I seem to feel white curtains blow across me, I wander in a

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garden. The wind is in the trees. And then with a flash it all comes to me. Those spires and domes are the heaven of my childhood! I see it all again, the castellated walls and pinnacles and the golden streets and the jeweled gates. An aunt in my childhood always wore on her forefinger an oblong amethyst stone—basis of my early anticipation in the joys of Paradise. There among the dark trees must be flashing the amethyst gate, and the jasper and the chrysoprase and the “sardine stone”—whatever that was! And I think it must have had something of this meaning to the *muzhiks*.

Since it is not yet time for the train, I have strolled up to the terrace above the river to drink tea—amber tea which halves every grief and doubles every joy in Russia! Below me walls of a thousand years keep guard toward Asia. And here it is, on this free sweep of terrace hanging above the crumbling walls, with the wind blowing from the eastern steppe, that the most powerful impression of the Volga is laid deep in my consciousness. On all sides the plain spreads toward the horizon with the continuity of the sea, a wild, illimitable level. But it is the river that holds

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me fascinated. One of the lumber-steamers anchored above the caravan pushes off with rings of smoke and swings out into the river past the thick-bodied, flat-bottomed boats, the waves foaming white with the paddles; the main current is laden with a caravan of river rafts which the water bears as cockle-shells. It could crush them, too, as cockles. It pours itself along now a molten, deceptive blue, but I remember that at the spring thaw warnings must be flashed ahead to dwellers on even the tributary banks that the river has broken bounds, is splintering the black hulks frozen in its surface, and crashing its thunderous gray-grained way to the sea. I know that old Ignaat Gordyeev spoke true, old Ignaat watching his handsome new grain-steamers crushed against the banks. "Mother Volga can rend the whole world apart as one cuts curds with a knife." And so it can, "as one cuts curds with a knife," and pass on, vast, unhurrying, uncaring, a huge force "not having as yet created for itself clear aims and desires"; like Russia, unconscious, unconquerable; a ruthless protean power as yet escaped the subduing which has come to man through toil and anguish, this vast old whale path!

PART III

XVI

BEHIND M. NOVINSKY'S EYES

A WHITE barrage moves across Moscow, but, in spite of the phantom bombardment, I have been sitting on the Kremlin wall, watching the city like a dim old enamel below. I understand now the glow in M. Novinsky's face. This is the Russia that lay back of his eyes, this quaint tapestry woven and dyed with centuries of Russian dreams and prayers, this splendid old Bagdad. This and the Volga! Dmitri Nikolaivitch's Russia and mine. The manager of the hotel has given me a room overlooking a court where pigeons are fluttering and feeding in the sunshine as if at St. Mark's. I sit for hours, a balconied princess looking beyond to roofs patterned like a caliph's dream. It is not sad to be alone here. Strangely enough, I feel companioned. It is the illusion of place. I must meet M. Novinsky here, it seems to me, in

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these devious old streets, this ancient brocade, overlaid with medievalism, mellow with all the accumulated richness of the Slavic race.

Moscow—it is the flower of Russia! Petrograd is a bureaucrat's town, transplanted and artificial, but Moscow is the sum of the natural processes of centuries of a race-soul. One need not be told; it is in the churches and the streets, in the aura of the people. Here are still the houses of the *boyars*. Here rose the stronghold of consolidated Muscovite power; here in the sacred Uspensky cathedral the Czars are christened, wed, and crowned. Above the city reigns the Kremlin, not the Kremlin of the Middle Ages, but a phoenix rising each century resplendent from its ashes, more sheerly dominating the city than any other city in the world is dominated, than Peking by the Great Gates or Rome by St. Peter's.

Of course I can never comprehend Moscow; without Dmitri Nikolaievitch I am bewildered. No Westerner, born and bred to miles of gray stones, could be other than astonished and subdued at the sight of the Kremlin, a congress of starry palaces and cathedrals, rising mystical and barbaric above the pink em-

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battled walls with which the Tartars encompassed their city; "the two extremes of Asia joined together and enshrined in the heart of Slavism—the marauding spirit of the Mongol conquerors mixed with the sensuality of Byzantine Orientalism—the God of Battles and the God of Prayer explained as one and the same conception of God, worshiped on a half-overturned altar of Moloch."

It is for me a never fully explored dream, the Kremlin. Perhaps it is the marauding Mongol in me that turns my steps thither, stopping sometimes at the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, a street chapel so sacred that even the Czar must pray there before he enters the Kremlin, through the red Spasskaya gate where every man from *izvostchik* to Emperor must remove his hat in order to be prepared for the glories within; past the "Czar Poushka," the king of cannon captured from Napoleon's broken army; and leads my way among palaces and cathedrals into the dimmest and richest of recessed interiors.

The spacing is not magnificent as it is at St. Isaac's; the cathedrals are all built on a closer scale, like the *boyars'* houses, but so rich in jeweled mosaics that for a moment one

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fancies the Peacock Throne of the Great Moguls translated into a room. The gorgeous beauty hangs about one like incense, the spirit of Slavic adoration made tangible, exultation made manifest. I am all alone here except for peasant women, but I am never without the sense of the shadowy hosts. There hang the banners of Pultova and Plevna, and by the altar is the sacred ikon that went before the armies of Kulikovo. Here is a scimitar of Suleiman the Magnificent, and the floor is a jasper gift from the Shah of Persia. This candelabrum of solid silver, from the Russian soldiers themselves, commemorates Napoleon's broken army; and in that ikon is an emerald that might flank the Kohinoor. To pray in this niche is to shudder, for here Ivan the Terrible used to hear Mass; there lies his body at rest—freed at last from its murderous rages. Under a silken canopy sleeps Boris Godunov and the little prince he slew. The peasant women kiss the mask of the murdered *malenki*, the little one. It was in Uspensky, most sacred of cathedrals, that Napoleon stabled his horses, and sometimes in the silence of the praying peasant women I fancy I can hear the drums fore and aft.

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Sometimes I climb to the aery of "Kolokol, the Big Bell," and there from the Ivan Bell-tower, hung and strung with bells, I can look far down the river and across to the old green monastery roofs. There is a beautiful painting in one of the Petrograd galleries of the Russian bell-ringers in the towers and I have promised myself to haunt Kolokol until some saint's day sees him rung, the picturesque ringers pulling mightily at the ropes!

There in the upper air, too, I feel nearer the abyss *out there*.

The Russia that I hear in Rachmaninoff, in Rimsky-Korsakov, in Tchaikowsky, is here—the Russia that I see in the ballet, that I felt most powerfully on the Volga, that I sensed but never found in the capital, that I am aware of deep in M. Novinsky. A nation growing widely, thrusting its roots deep, living with a deep unawareness; a nation for whom life is "not performance, but adventure"; a nation too great to be labeled and catalogued, colossal enough to topple over and crush any system, menacing but fascinating; a nation exploding so powerfully from within that its destiny can neither be predicted nor deter-

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mined by any man nor any group of men, evolving strange symmetries and casting up from its depth its own new orders and new laws which form only to break and form again. Is it only the pagan in me that shrinks from having Russia learn the superficial advancedness, the sophisticated technique, the thin knowingness of the West? Is it only the barbarian that hopes out of this unordered portentousness, these bizarre symmetries, to catch new meanings, new *élan* of life, new mystic sources of power?

M. Novinsky is the cosmopolitan, more neatly finished than anything purely Russian, but for all his polished perfection and *mondaine* quality it is the Russia of his background, and I think his charm is this same immense naturalness. I remember seeing the passion for it in his eyes once when we were watching the Tartar scene in "Kitish," and his expression as he exclaimed, "God forbid that that scene should ever sober down!" There is a nostalgia perhaps in each of us for the earth as it was in the beginning.

This to me, a cellular sensitiveness of life, must be always the miracle of Russia. Not happiness—no, it is not happiness, for happi-

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ness is built on peace, but something more turbulent, more poignant, but more profound. However crusted over by institutions and tradition, life here is a stream swiftly changing, complex; organic rather than inorganic; cells dividing from within, newly combining; ceaseless processes of mental and spiritual parturition. However ringed about by the steel ring of bureaucracy, Russia has never died at the heart; she grows from within as sturdily as a young bamboo.

As I sit on the Kremlin wall, gazing down on the city below, I ponder many things. America is like a design leading out from the center and leaving one restless and dissatisfied. But Russia, thrown constantly back upon herself, has built up a soul to pit against the world. Is not this the reason why, a hundred years after she had a literary language, she produced the one notable literature of this century? A tongue newly articulate, but a life old in wisdom. The West has laid ingenious hands upon the trappings, the substitutes and imitations, all the anodynes of life, but I cannot but feel that Russia has the quivering reality.

XVII

AN ADVENTURE IN PERSONALITY

DAY after day the gods are pouring sunshine steadily down on this old citadel of the North, picking out the colors like the stones in a Florentine mosaic. What a wonderful old city for happiness! I feel a powerful rhythm in this old city, not yet disrupted by the war, although I have lost my own beat and I sit in the sunshine, waiting, waiting for Something that never happens, for Somebody who never comes. Can it be that all that subtle sense of significance, all that responsiveness, all that remembered tenderness, have perished out there in the dark? "It is the common fate." But even to have been his friend for a day is to feel life mellow, full of *nuance*, overhung with a soft wonder.

Moscow does what she may to warm the cockles of the heart. She might be Italian were she not so Russian; and I did discover a

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bit of Venice yesterday, an old woman feeding pigeons in the piazza of the cathedral near the Spasskaya gate, a pleasant bit of grotesquerie against the apple-green, milk-white, sky-blue spires of the cathedral which soared to the heavens in strange flutings and convolutions. I longed to hear her tell tales of the Tartar Khans of Kazan, as Sasha told me tales of little devils sitting on a rooftree and the sprites that filled their pitchers at the spring. I would be troubadour for a day, for only a troubadour could faintly express the fragrance of this "many-towered Camelot."

After all, personality is the great adventure, and I have come upon a rare one in Madame Novinska's greatest friend in Moscow, Madame Berentskaya. Moscow is Russian tradition. Many noble houses here are more ancient than the reigning house of Romanoff, and Madame Berentskaya has opened the door of some of these houses before which one might sit a lifetime in vain, doors through which I have caught glimpses of old Russian life, as one sometimes glimpses courts and flowers and moon-doors through the great gates of the East. No longer magnificent in

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estate, Madame Berentskaya, but none the less the unmistakable patrician of intelligence and heart, with an atmosphere much the same as that of Madame Novinska. The fine fiber was always there, I am certain, but perhaps her association with Tolstoi has left its stamp of moral earnestness. Many guests have come and gone at Yasnaya Polyana, but few have stood so near the prophet as Madame Berentskaya, a co-worker in the famine relief of 1905 and a translator of Tolstoi's works. Her reminiscences of those famous after-dinner moonlit *causeries*, when the master himself set the key for discussion, should be chapters in Russian literature.

Being of a scribe's tendency myself, I find as inexhaustible interest in the habits of the writing *genus homo* as Fabre found in his bee world. Tolstoi's daily life at Yasnaya Polyana Madame Berentskaya has often discussed with me. His habit was to have tea alone in his study and to work through the morning; to lunch with his family and guests, and to ride or walk through the estate in the afternoon, alone or with a companion of his choosing; to dine again at night at the long family table. It was he who usually started the

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brilliant talk after dinner which pointed up the thought of the day.

"And by what standard shall we judge the artist?" began the gaunt figure, pacing up and down under the trees, one white night at Yasnaya Polyana.

"By three things, I say: by invention, by sincerity, by form."

"And what would you say of Russian writers measured by these standards?" ventured somebody among the respectful group who listened in the shadows.

"Gogol first in every respect," he answered, after a pause. "Dostoevski, no. Invention, marvelous; sincerity, undoubted; form, none."

"And Tolstoi, what of him?"

"Tolstoi," mused the figure in the peasant's smock. "Tolstoi—invention, yes, to some degree; form, chaotic; sincerity, *absolute!*"

Sincerity was, to Madame Berentskaya, Tolstoi's passion, and not the least part of his genius.

When I voiced the world's question as to the reason for Tolstoi's flight just before his death from everything that was personally human and dear, Madame Berentskaya named Tolstoi's secretary.

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"A man of inflexible purpose," she said, "the preservation of Tolstoi's spiritual legacy unspotted to the world. If Tolstoi would leave his ideal pure, resurgent, it was as necessary in the eyes of this man that he should die one of the despised and rejected as it had been that Christ should be crucified. It has been an ever-present question in my mind whether Leov, left alone in those feeble last days, would not have sought the sacrament of the Church. The two did stop at a monastery—this secretary and he—you remember, but they went on. I have so often wondered what Leov would have done had he been alone. He died at the railway station soon after, with poor Countess Tolstoi begging outside for permission to say farewell. You remember her cry, 'The friend of a lifetime, and I am not even permitted to hear his last words.' Ah, *milaya*, there it is again—the incompatibility of the actual and the ideal! It is to make one despair."

"And is there no reconciliation?" I begged.

Madame Berentskaya shook her head. "I do not know," she answered, sadly.

The sincerity of Tolstoi I have often heard questioned in Russia. He is not in his own

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land the mountain-peak as is Dostoevski, with his boundlessly suggestive philosophy, and knowing the Russian, I find it not difficult to understand the reason. But to question his sincerity, it is inconceivable!

Once, after he had been dangerously ill, Madame Berenskaya was invited to Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoi was still in bed and weak.

"And now, Leov, tell me," said Madame Berenskaya as she sat down by his bedside, "since you have been so near death, tell me what you think of the beyond."

A strong emotion passed over Tolstoi's face and for some minutes he did not answer. And then turning his shaggy gaze upon her, he replied, "Elena Ivanovna, I assure you, so great is my sense of sin that if I believed that I must carry it with me beyond this life, I could not be responsible." And he fell back trembling.

"Is it true, then," I begged of Madame Berenskaya, "that Tolstoi did not believe in the continuity of identity after death, in a personal immortality?"

And again Madame Berenskaya answered sadly and slowly, "I do not know."

Yesterday I came to Madame Berenskaya

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looking a bit fagged. Turning me to the light, she scrutinized me closely.

"You have been overworking again, *golubchik*," she warned.

"Yes, madame," I smiled, hopelessly. "I am trying to paint a Russian man."

"Ah, *milaya*," Madame Berentskaya shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of despair. "Who can paint a Russian man?"

Last night I dined in an ancient house, built around a court, as is the Novinskys', a house in which one of the scenes from *War and Peace* is laid, and quite the same as in the old days when the brilliantly uniformed young officers swaggered through its high-ceilinged rooms at balls or enormous suppers, home from conquering Napoleon!

It is all so strange. Am I really walking through *War and Peace*? The same names recur, the same figures with which Tolstoi's gigantic canvas is crowded. These men with whom I dine, they are Rostovs and Volkon-skys; I recognize them. I even know the bear-like Pierre Bezukhoff. The Russians themselves say that it is a re-turning of the pages of history, even to the hesitations, delays, shifting of responsibility that character-

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ized the Napoleonic campaigns—the national characteristics endlessly repeated. Sometimes when I have come from the Tolstoi Museum, where I have pored over photographs of Yasnaya Polyana, of the shaggy peasant figure in the fields, on horseback, in his study, with wife, with daughter or guests, alone under the limes, gnarled, weighted with the sense of sin and moral responsibility, agonizingly isolated in his spiritual anguish, I feel that in a parting of the throng I must come upon the Terrible Seeker. One need never in Moscow be lonely for the dead.

Often, too, on the street I feel that I must meet Tchekov, who loved Moscow tenderly. I have heard Madame Berenskaya reminisce of him, too, a whimsically sad, keen, but withdrawn man. And often I remember that great wind of which he speaks which is to clear Russian life. And it is here in Moscow, Tchekov's own city, where the hospitals are overflowing and every house has lost a son, that one feels Holy Mother Russia.

No, one need not in Moscow feel lonely for the dead. Of late M. Novinsky has been inexplicably here, too. I go on the walks he would have chosen. I speak to him about the

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pictures he loved. I can see his face lighting with his un-self-conscious smile, the movement of his narrow hands, his slight, compact figure. If there were mists here as in Petrograd, I am certain he would emerge. Is it possible that he, too, has passed *za granitza*—beyond the borders—and returned to me here in Moscow, where the dead are known?

XVIII

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

NATALYA NIKOLAIEVNA is in Moscow. I met her at the station this morning, the same station where Vronsky first sees Anna alighting from the train. It was Tolstoi's scene repeated; the train rumbling in, shaking the station, the smart conductor and the heterogeneous passengers. One of the slim, long-waisted officers talking near me might have been Vronsky and Stepan Arkadyevitch, the luxurious figure with curling beard and the flower in his buttonhole. Sometimes I see Anna Karenina in Natalya Nikolaievna, the dark hair clustering about a semi-pellucid skin, and the sensitive red mouth, except that Natalya Nikolaievna is taller than Anna Karenina, with more the air of a reserved young princess. The resemblance was very striking to-day when she alighted from the train, less frail than usual and more vivacious.

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"Ah, *Amerikanka*," she cried, kissing me on both cheeks, her long gray eyes shining through her black lashes, "I bear good tidings! News! News! Do you understand, *Amerikanka*? God grant that it is true—news from my brother, from Dmitri!"

A message out of that blind immensity! I could not speak; I could only look at her as one might look at some bright angel who bore confirmation of a paradise.

And then while Masha, the little maid with fair braids wound round her head, and old Anton looked after the luggage, she told me the meager detail. A message had come, only one word, a quaint word they had used as children. "The word makes it certain." She laid her hands on my shoulders and looked at me with shining eyes. "No one knew but Dmitri and me."

She withdrew her hands from my shoulders and stood for a moment, wrapt in memory. She was very like Dmitri Nikolaievitch at that moment. What an intensity of feeling these Russians have, that makes other passions look compromising and commonplace! And then we made our way out of the cavernous station, through which the spring sunshine stole ten-

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tatively like new little tendrils of joy in a barren life, and rolled away under the burgeoning limes which seemed but the precipitation of one's own joy.

Natalya spread her thin hands in the sunshine. "Ah, this wonderful old city!" she cried, as we followed the winding streets. "My school-days were spent here. How I love it! One does not ask enough of life!"

One does not ask enough of life!

I have been to pray at the little chapel under the Kremlin Hill. "Unexpected Joy," the Russians have named it—the chapel that I love best in Moscow. How well these Slavs know the heart! Dear godmother, once you warned me that life would lead me to religion; it has not been through sorrow, as you feared, but it is something akin to pain.

Perhaps it is only the sunshine, perhaps it is the news of a Russian victory, perhaps it is the *maltchiks* crying great bunches of lilies on the street that makes me so blithe. But suddenly in the midst of it there strikes one grim note. Seven officers were hanged to-day. The *Novoye Vremya* prints only the statement and the Russians are silent.

It is not in victory, but in crises, that one is

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most conscious of the Slav. It is in catastrophe that the Russians draw together as if by racial impulse, and from the circle of their anxiety look coldly or indifferently at the foreigner. They talk little, ceasing when I enter, and I am warned not to speak English, the language of an ally, on the street. What do we of America, the blend of every nationality, know of this pure, white-hot flame of an inbred race? How many new currents are visible nowadays! At first Russian life moves on a fairly undisturbed stream of existence, but gradually, as one's eyes become accustomed to the complexity, and more observant, mysterious whirlpools manifest themselves, and strange subterranean flows.

A bit of Mlle. Novinska's natural gaiety has returned, an enchanting thing to see. To-day we went to the Nobility School near the Red Gate, at which she was educated, an enormous white structure rambling about a court. We were admitted by a decorative butler, who scrutinized me suspiciously and left us to wait in the drawing-room furnished with rosewood and a chrysoprase table and pervaded with a

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fragrance which suggested the passing of a Lely or a Kellner beauty.

"He regards you as if you might be about to elope with the pet princess," twinkled Mlle. Novinska.

Madame T., the principal, was more cordial. It was touching to see her when she took Natalya Nikolaievna's hands.

"Ah, *dushenka*, I know. The fiancé," she murmured, kissing Natalya Nikolaievna on both cheeks. "But you are brave and God will be good to you."

She turned to me with an enveloping smile. "I remember this one as so tiny a child. 'The black witch,' the girls used to name her. She was so fiery, with a wee face and such thin arms, always curled up reading. And *madame, votre mère?* Ah, mademoiselle, she is one of the truly great ladies of Russia. And the little brother who was at the *Corps des Pages?* Do you remember how he used to come in his long uniform, always with a big box of sweets, looking like a young Napoleon?"

We had tea at the hands of the suspicious butler, who evidently approved no Americans invading this sacrosanct spot, where not a drop

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of other than titled blood flows, whose walls not even an American millionairess could scale with father's golden ladder.

"I wish *Mademoiselle l'Américaine* to see our monastery," Mlle. Novinska said.

"If you are expecting luxuries," Madame T. warned, "turn back. No scented quarters here heaped with silken pillows; no seductive sweet-eating princesses."

And indeed it was, in spite of Madame T.'s warning, far less luxurious than I had imagined. A scrubbed and sanded monastery with white walls and rows of iron beds. We entered into an airy room with beds in a row, each with an ikon at its head. The plain toilet articles and bath slippers of straw were arranged with geometric precision. Madame T. opened the wardrobes that we might see. Each showed one heavy stuff dress, two pairs of woolen stockings, a coat, and a tam-o'-shanter for outside, not in the street—little nobles do not walk in the street, but in the courtyard, the same sunny courtyard that we could see outside the window, where the Czar and Czarina come for tea. The school was established by Elizabeth and is directly under the patronage of the Czar, the highest medal

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that a girl can win being the monogram of the Empress in diamonds.

"She rarely comes now, the Empress," said Madame T., "but how lovely she was in those days!"

"Yes, I remember," Mlle. Novinska murmured.

In the linen-room, stacked high with snowy homespun linen, patient maids were mending with exquisite stitches. Mlle. Novinska greeted two of the maids while I gazed and gazed at those peasant-plain garments. Unlike the poet, I thought not a little of the revelation therein. Before me seethed the embroidery and lace from which the American girl rises like Venus from the foam. These garments were simplicity itself, not only simple, but heavy and durable.

"No man could quite comprehend the abysmal difference," I murmured to Natalya Nikolaievna.

"In all things the young Russian girls, like the young French girls, are superbly unspoiled," answered Mlle. Novinska, reading my thought, "but when they are married their trousseaus are magnificent. The trousseau of my best friend, when she was married, was fit for a

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museum. As for seclusion, at first she dared not even drive alone or drink so much as a white wine without her husband's permission, all of which amused the husband enormously."

"And in all this there is the touch of the epicurean East."

"Yes. How more deliciously prepare a woman? When she goes to her husband, her senses, her imagination, are as fresh as the day she was born," said Mlle. Novinska. "She is ready for all the delicate allurements of life, for the Russian loves a woman not alone for the woman herself, but for what she can give him."

"In spite of all the camaraderie in Russia"—Madame T. frowned severely—"we are not yet free from the harem."

The princesses themselves are stiff little figures in such costumes as I can imagine no boarding-school girl in America wearing: heavy blue stuff skirts, coarse, clean cotton blouses, broad leather belts, and hair in braids. They courtesy shyly as we pass, with a well-bred lack of curiosity. Three girls were standing at a cross-section of the corridor, a roguish gipsy face and two paler, straighter types with short bangs like an old French print,

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all in the heavy blue skirts and aprons tied at the back.

"Countess X's daughter, the dark one," said the principal, mentioning a famous name. "Her grandfather is one of our richest land-owners. She will be a figure some day in Russia."

"All these bobbing little girls are the bearers of the great names of Russia," said Natalya Nikolaievna. "In a few years they will exchange their sensible boots for French heels, put up their long braids, lengthen their skirts overnight, and, *voilà!*—the Kittys and Natashas and Anna Kareninas—the brilliant, sophisticated women of Russian society."

"None of them speak less than five languages," added Madame T.

"And are they so well educated in other ways?" I asked, respectfully eying the little polyglots.

Madame T. shook her head gravely.

"Russians are Orientals in temper, and the children, like their elders, are wretchedly disciplined," she sighed. "I know one woman who was so bewildered and terrified by her children that she never went near her nursery. Can you imagine a little girl of eight declaring

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vehemently to the governess, 'You may beat us and pinch us and cut us up in fine pieces and boil us in oil, but we will never, never say that we love mother as well as we love you.' All wealthy Russians employ English governesses to discipline their children."

Through miles of spotless corridors we went, past innumerable immaculate rooms where smooth braids bent over books or industrious fingers recounted endless scales.

"It was there I had scarlet fever," smiled Natalya Nikolaievna, looking in at the cool, white hospital. "Dmitri sent old Yégor with his parakeet—do you remember?—lest I might die!"

And then we went below to see the baths. "The same Russian *banya* in which all Russia steams in one mighty cloud every Saturday night from the Arctic to the Caspian, from the Pacific to the Gulf," laughed Natalya Nikolai-evna. And so it was, a long, heated room with benches and a flagged floor, where the little patricians splash and scrub one another and climb on the top shelves to steam.

"Can you imagine it in England or in America," said Natalya Nikolaievna, "all this steaming aristocracy?"

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"A scene for a Russian Alma-Tadema, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Perhaps it was only our mood that made it all seem so amusing. Our trail led back through the dining-room, where on the tables clustered blue glass bowls.

"*Nu, Amerikanka*, of course you cannot understand," Mlle. Novinska laughed, deliciously. "Have you ever read of gentlemen who waved their hands to dry them and rinsed their mouths from golden ewers? These bowls are of the Middle Ages. One rinses one's mouth after dining! The custom continues in not a few houses of the old nobility."

How I should have liked seeing the little lad from the Pages' School solemnly sending his parakeet to the little black witch sister, "lest she might die!"

This more than half old Byzantine city is forever flinging a new jewel into one's lap as magnificently as if she were the mistress of Aladdin's lamp. And it is well to have baubles, for no one knows when Dmitri Nikolaivitch returns. Last night it was the Artistic Theater, the despair and the joy of connoisseurs—Gordon Craig, Granville Bar-

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ker, and even the Germans. And yet Madame Novinska remembers, only twenty years ago, an evening of amateur theatricals at the house of a rich merchant, Alexieff, in which the merchant himself played the leading rôles. And the merchant is still playing the leading rôles, for he was Stanislavsky.

The theater is of the simplest. The walls are done in a forest brown with a frieze of Tchekov's *chaiki*, sea-gulls, in stenciled flight. The curtain also is a woodsy brown, with white gulls pinioned against it, reminiscent of Tchekov's "Sea Gull," and also of the incomparable Komissarshevskaya's tragically wild and tender rôle. The whole atmosphere is serious. It is not the mode to dress, and the audience looks like a flock of wrens. But the faces are intellectually eager and the eyes smoldering eyes never seen on Broadway.

"I never feel so much a vulgar intruder as at the Artistic Theater," Mlle. Novinska declares, "spying on private affairs which should be no concern to the public."

To me the Artistic Theater spells two great traits of the Russian: extreme realism and a deep vein of poetry. In a realistic play, the art is photographic. If a play is to be given

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in the Tambov dialect, the company lives in Tambov for the summer. If the scene is laid in Greece, the rôles are assimilated under Hellenic skies. The peasant is disgustingly true to life! The Russians are realists and their dramatic realism reaches its meticulous *ne plus ultra* in Tchekov, a whimsical master of genre who opposed the artificial cutting away of contingent matter and the intense focusing of dramatic conversation and action. He wrote, one might say, in the flat. And yet, through what seems a sea of irrelevant and trivial detail runs a large and inexplicable poetry. And with a similar technique the Artistic Theater plays Tchekov, casting up significance from the commonplace, chaotic details like a delicate lacy pattern. That which with other players is unintelligible and dull becomes, with their technique, suffused with meaning—pathos, despair, longing—which are the reality of Russian provincial life. When the play is not realistic, the Russian wanders in strange vales of the imagination, of which the Saxon has little intimation. Gordon Craig, searching for new symbols of dramatic representation, chose among the players of the Artistic Theater for figures to set against

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his sweeping lines of pity and fear. The result of the experiment was a "Hamlet" that marked a new epoch in the theater—a "Hamlet" Greek in the pity and fear induced by its setting, and as acted by these marvelously intelligent and sensitive players, Greek in its terror and tragedy—a high poetic achievement.

"Stanislavsky is the dominant personality now, as he has always been," Mlle. Novinska informed me. "A leonine Byronesque man with magnificent dark eyes under his heavy brows."

Mlle. Knipper is the *première* among the actresses. The play was "Autumn Violins," a dramatic bit, as melancholy as a Russian autumn itself. One can but follow Knipper avidly. She is not beautiful now, but she is poetic and *sympatechnaya* and—the woman whom Tchekov loved.

We had tea between the acts with the little beagle-eyed secretary, who told us that but for the war the company would have been in England next year, and asked about certain productions in America, with an eye to the future of the Artistic Theater. And then after the theater, through his kindness, we

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went behind the scenes to Tchekova's (Mlle. Knipper's) dressing-room.

Lafcadio Hearn's epitaph to the grass-lark who, when Hana, the housemaid, forgot to feed him, ate his own legs, might have been written above Tchekova's door: "Yet, after all, to devour one's legs for hunger is not the worst that can happen to a being cursed with a gift of song. There are human crickets who must eat their own hearts in order to sing." A spent figure in a lavender dressing-gown sat limply in front of an enormous mirror, while a maid, too wise to touch her, hovered in the background. In "Autumn Violins" she had played the rôle of a mother who married her own lover to a daughter in order to avert scandal. The Russians all about us had commented, "She ages moment by moment." And I had felt it, too, with anguish less akin to pity than to terror. Now this disintegrating woman sat before me, dark lines following her sagging cheeks, two splashes shadowing her eyes, the weariest thing in the world. And I realized—as if I had not realized it a thousand times before—the pain of a being "cursed with the gift of song."

When I thanked Tchekova for the pleasure

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she had given me she looked at me with Russian kindness and a little curiosity. "You liked my play?" she asked, a little wistfully. It may have been acting; if so, it was superb. Tchekova, the idol of Russia, wistfully asking for commendations!

"But that is quite sincere," Mlle. Novinska assured me, as we turned away. "With us, especially at the Artistic Theater, our great players are very humble." I wanted to beg Mlle. Knipper to talk of Tchekov, but it did not seem the one perfect topic, since the rumor is that she made him miserably unhappy. The company was leaving on the night train to play their annual term in Petrograd, a *festa* in the theatrical world for the capital, and I lingered only long enough to beg Tchekova to come to America, an idea in which she was as interested as the barest neophyte. Two strong impressions will always remain of this *première* among Russian players—sympathy and work—a sympathy as universal as life—the human being marvelously realized—and relentless labor.

I comprehend, too, why the Russian, when in London, avoids the drama.

XIX

"SOMETHING POIGNANT"

ONE might linger forever in this sunny paradise; as a matter of fact, however, I shall be away to the Novinskys' summer place as soon as the lake clears. No message from Dmitri Nikolaievitch out of the dark. My life is a House of a Thousand Emptinesses.

Madame Novinska went to Tver before the ice broke, but just now the lake is an *impasse* and the only road to Bortnaka is a hundred versts around the shore over Russian roads, difficult at any time and bottomless in spring. I remember Madame Novinska's narration of how the doctor at O—— drove all night, with fresh horses every hour, once when M. Novinsky was ill, only to assure her that she was doing all that was possible, drink huge draughts of coffee, snatch a fish-pasty, and then drive all day back again.

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I have been making pilgrimages these days to all the well-beloved haunts of my Bagdad—to the intimate sketches of Russian life at the Tretyakov Gallery, and the Vereshchagins, Oriental and opulent and shimmering with heat; to Gelza last night at the ballet, dancing her fantastie Belgique, gleaming in red and gold and trumpet-clear, the apotheosis of the Belgian spirit; to Kolokol and Uspensky and, not least, to the pigeons at the Spasskaya gate. And to-day I 'am just home from Sparrow Hills.

Princess Kalitzina's cousin came for me, and it was charming out on that old Moscow road to Sparrow Hills, past the "Not Dull" palace stretching its pale buff length along the river among the mysterious Böcklin trees, and the park, a fresh sunny paradise. From the terrace of Sparrow Hills the city unrolls, a vast, illuminated scroll below, the capital picked out in blue and green and gold, bound only by the silver of river and sky. If the hills had kept a guest-book they would have recorded many a famous guest, even that most distinguished Moscow visitor, Napoleon Bonaparte! It was from this terrace that Napoleon sought to decipher the beautiful prize and

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gazed upon the long-coveted city disappearing in fire and smoke.

It was inexpressibly fragrant as we sat and sipped tea on the parapet in the soft spring sunshine, under the budding limes—Anna Tcherbatskaya (Princess Kalitzina’s delicious young cousin—not long since married, absorbed in a pensive reverie of the young surgeon at the front) and I. Anna Tcherbatskaya has just been on a visit to the front, traveling like a young empress, and has lived seventeen days just below the crest of a hill, under the roar of the guns. I look at her, and for the moment I am in the Petrograd hospital again and I hear M. Novinsky’s quaint, un-English voice, “No one gives herself like a Russian.” Nevertheless, I count it something for a girl who, until her marriage two months ago, had never crossed the street alone. And so we sat, I musing on the city below, on Napoleon and many things neither the city nor Napoleon, on this strange world which that something within me called from the unknown, and which I feel has taken for me a significance of finality.

Of one thing I am certain—never again shall I be free from Russia. Foot-loose, I

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must always turn eastward. It flashes various colors through me, this modern Byzantium; sometimes I feel positively iridescent with the radiance—gorgeous, barbaric—unleashing everything that the Anglo-Saxon has tamed in me. A curious dream which has haunted me since childhood has returned: the dim cool of a Byzantine courtyard, a blue sky above, columns ineffably gray and old, the soft *pad, pad* of slave feet in the dust, and a woman, lying near a pool, dreaming passionate dreams. The image had been long allayed until it came to life again in this Oriental Russia. Sometimes, again, this fragrant, melancholy old land calls to something strange and deep within me. I seem to hear the Nubians singing again at night on the Nile, and yet I no longer thrill. A strange white peace fills my soul; at the heart of the turbulence lies infinite repose. A quiet hand has been laid upon me. I feel all the hopes and loves of all the ages breaking about me, and the beauty and pathos of life becomes poignant, unendurable! It is not happiness, is it, this pain?

And yet it draws me—the mystery of all this brooding land draws me irresistibly.

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Like death, Russia throws everything into greater significance. Perhaps it is Dante's blessedness. Perhaps it is— Who can define it? Beside it, placid English life flowing between its lush banks seems spiritually flat and commonplace. Something so far stranger and sweeter and deeper is here, that for one second of it one would not exchange ten years of cheerful security. In both America and the Orient lies a far clearer happiness than in Russia: America strong, youthful, certain; the lotus-East with its suggestion of eternal peace, the junk sails in the purple mists, and the temple bells calling across the little valleys. And yet I must always return to this. “Something homely and poignant.”

Yes, I comprehend, Dmitri Nikolaievitch, though you no longer bare for me its injustice, its struggle, its melancholy, and you, whether you live still here or there beyond, have become for me the sum and crown of its poignance.

XX

FROM TURGENEV'S WORLD

BORTNAKA at last! Russian country, beloved by poet and peasant, and now adding another adorer though an alien. Dmitri Nikolaievitch's Russian country! I left Moscow in the late afternoon and journeyed by night, an eerie white night which only half closed the curtains of day and invested the world with a gray ghostly charm. Summer travelers across Siberia must needs carry blue curtains to defend themselves against this pervasive half-light. Without these blue guards the journey may add to itself as experience, but it sadly deteriorates as a journey. Sleep is out of the question, and the senses, overstrained by the continuous light, are as ragged as the beggars who peer out of the stations. Verst after verst, hour after hour, the plain unwinds endlessly, monotonously, like wool from a skein. Objects fringe ghost-

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ily; trees blur in the half-light and grow preternaturally large. A primitive terror sweeps through one's limbs. The earth is off its orbit, running wild in space. One calls to the eternal hills for deliverance—but there is not even a rise in the ground! With midnight springs up a delusive promise of respite from the light; a shadow creeps reassuringly over the earth, but it is dusk and not darkness. At eleven the sun dips below the horizon; at two-thirty it is balancing itself again on the rim of earth like a flattened orange, spilling a crimson-and-amethyst flood over the world. The relentless cycle has begun again. It is a lonely mood, and yet I am not lonely; I am curiously, half-pensively, half-childishly content. Am I not bound for Agatha and the tarts and the limes? Besides, again the illusion of place is upon me. With every new spot, Dmitri Nikolaievitch, it seems to me, must appear. A message must wait at Bortnaka!

The train deposits me at what should be an early hour, but, by the tale of the sun, a day well advanced. It is a dusty little station, inside which travelers in smocks are drinking tea, sucking sugar under their tongues. A

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shy little peasant girl offers me buttercups and daisies "for the love of God and the aid of the wounded"—a kindly little creature. I want to ask her if she fancies gooseberry tarts, but I have only time to fumble for a penny and clamber into a cavernous vehicle which scurries off through the dust in the direction of the boat. What a *calash* is I have never known, but that rickety, swinging shell, threatening every moment to dissolve into the elements from which it came, satisfies entirely my imagination. Perhaps I am not exigent to-day—bound for Bortnaka.

Russian landscape is like an amateur photographer's work, all sky and only a rim of land. It is like a giant billiard-table ready for the play, except that there are no pockets, and the sky lies imminent above. Sky in Russia does not offer a varied show. I cannot remember seeing ever the rich pageantry that I used to watch for hours through the arch of the caravan in Mongolia, but in the absence of anything else one becomes intimate with it, and gradually it induces the mood of *netchevo*.

The lake might be a Scottish lake, were there more hills. There are few passengers; only

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peasants, lounging, thick-muscled fellows with tanned necks, and women in red skirts. The two men in corduroy next me talk hunting-dogs while I gaze at the monastery towers, flashing a startling, unearthly radiance across the waters, and watch the weather-beaten captain release his hands from the wheel to cross himself to the spires and domes. In spite of Agatha and the tarts, I feel lost, and that not in a country, but in a continent. Never have I had the sensation of traveling so far in so strange, so earthy a land. No sea, no outlet. It is one of the things I hate in Russia, this suffocation by the earth.

After two hours we begin turning into a small bay, and the captain, who looks after Madame Novinska's guests, comes to point out what seems to me a village overlooking the lake. I discern a great house with white pillars, half encircled by *izbas* and backed on three sides by deep forest—M. Novinsky's ancestral rooftree. An old Southern plantation dwelling it might be, except for the somber forest, purely and unmistakably Russian. An air of leisure and a patriarchal charm lies upon its grassy slopes. Will Tolstoi's Levin or Turgenev's Liza step out from the portico?

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The Novinskys I have always seen in far more formal environment.

Mlle. Novinska and three big hunting-dogs—from the Czar's kennels—with two lordly youths in hunting-togs, cousins just home on furlough, are standing at the pier, with a fringe of barefooted peasant maids in the background, all a-flutter in their gay aprons. It is an event, and I am the event! As for me, I feel myself immersed in peace. I could deposit myself on the pier, never to stir, except to watch the wind moving among the piny trees or follow the uncouth shadows on the lake.

Of my endless gallery of Russian pictures, few in which Mlle. Novinska figures I shall ever forget. She is wearing a broad hat which adds a piquant mystery to the shadows of her languid eyes, and trails her white skirts delicately over the greensward, tall and picturesque, not an image designed to make one abolish aristocracy. I search the thin face under the broad hat eagerly. A fainter tinge of rose follows the curve of the porcelain cheek than when I had seen her in Moscow.

"There has been no other news," she says, as our pageantry winds up the greensward

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under the trees toward the white columns, while two young peasant lads throw themselves on my luggage. "But for the sake of *ma mère* we must have courage. Who knows, there may be a message any day, any moment. I will not so easily believe that all is not well." I could feel her long fingers trembling on my arm.

And this is the hidden source of M. Novinsky's life. I cannot sleep for the delight of being here under this ancestral rooftree in the heart of the country, the background that yields a figure satisfying the deeps of one. Through the window I can see the little *izbas* dreaming wanly in the moonlight as dream the streets in Whistler's French villages. Beyond sighs the forest, blue-black, immense in this pale nocturnal stillness, as impenetrable as the heart of Russia itself; above its inchoateness the pines alone are like adventurers, tall ship masts above the band of black. After the open steppe, the forest allays my fears, bids me "lay down my heart," sings to me of security. I watch it, fascinated, as I have watched other woodlands—the gray-green, elfin forests of Ireland, the whispering bam-

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boo groves of China. This forest is far more enigmatic than other forests, far more sentient; in such fastnesses has been forged the will of Russia, in such mysteries has been shaped her soul. The wind rises and falls like a chant, like the desire of a people. How many strange shapes seem about to emerge—Stenka Razin, the *boyars* of Nizhni Novgorod and Kazan days; M. Novinsky's father. M. Novinsky himself must have come out of it many times as a dreaming little lad, hunting and fishing, as the university student, as the young *barin*. It lies mystic, quiescent now, draped with mists caught up in white garlands as if for some bridal—*nom de Dieu!* some ghostly bridal!

I was awakened this morning by old Yégor's voice, and looked out my casement window to see Madame Novinska, in a black frock with a white Elizabethan collar, cutting roses which she deposited in a shallow basket borne by the old majordomo. It is the first item in her day.

The Bortnaka house starts with a formal enough hall, paneled in red and hung with trophies of the chase, but it soon trails out into a small room where one may dry one's

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hunting-togs in winter, and on this side turns into a big living-room facing the lake. There are the usual beautiful hardwood floors, deeply luxurious divans, some fine old colored etchings, exquisite Persian rugs and embroideries which Madame and M. Novinsky gathered in Persia. The most formal room in the house is a room resplendent with ancestors, opening through French windows on the lake terrace and scented with the fragrance of wistaria and the lime walk below.

"You will find the house not less informal than the inmates," Mlle. Novinska had warned me the first morning. "The Russian is too wayward to stiffen into convention like the Britisher, and such punctiliousness as is his he leaves in town." On this old Russian estate, life is as simple and as rural as Tolstoi's Levin ever lived, with a venerable patriarchal charm, such as one finds under the ancestral roofs of the East.

Bortnaka breakfast is a movable feast. Imagine an *addicté* of the French roll and a cup of black coffee confronted by a ham entire; by a deep pottery bowl from which cream is ladled by a silver dipper; by monuments of hot bread suggestively neighbored

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by jams and marmalades, the whole guarded at the end of the table by a samovar of tea and an urn of coffee, all under the eyes of peasant maids in blue and red coifs, who take advantage of your innocence to leave bacon and eggs before you and desert you to your fate. Luncheon, only less astounding than breakfast, is served on the veranda under the limes, attended by a sapphire-eyed Persian cat who looks reflectively to the lake, dreaming, perhaps, of his own East. Everybody comes in outdoor togs, for everybody sails or swims or walks. Stepan and Piotr, very much the land *barins*, have been interviewing the forester or inspecting the wheat in the village beyond, or accompanying the official sent by the Government to teach the peasant intelligent methods of agriculture. And that in itself is another story. I am constantly amazed at the time and patience the landowners expend on their peasants. . . . Or it may be that Piotr has been out hunting with the dogs since dawn. There are two teas, one at four when the mail arrives—the postmaster is so terrified with English mail that he sends it outright to Madame Novinska and we sort it—and the other at nine, Russian

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fashion. And we dine, too! One changes for dinner, but it can hardly be called dressing, and afterward there is tennis in the twilight, that wondrous white light which invests all this northland with its eerie poetry.

The overseer comes with reports of the crops, the priest from that white tower across the lake, an old countess from the next estate, in worn Paris finery. And all through the house there is a stream of life, of men and dogs and hunting and news of the field and all the intangible freshness of things out of doors, and rarely good talk. The Russian does not, like the Saxon, leave his conversation in the city. The house is full of books: French novels, English biography, an excellent collection of Persia, some of them inscribed in a hand like Dmitri Nikolaivitch's neat script. I am never sure whether I like rainy days when I curl up in the library, watching the storm sweep down the lake, hearing tales of Bagdad or swirling down the Tigris in a basket, or the sunny days when I betake myself to the forest, watching the rafts building or simply wandering deeper and deeper among the ravines of shadows, looking into the upper leafy spaces. Madame Novinska

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spends much of her time alone, writing or working over plans for the estate. She feels a greater anxiety for Dmitri Nikolaivitch, I am certain, than she would admit, and in spite of the movement through the house there is always—for the first time, I confess it—a dread waiting for one knows not what—from *out there*—like that weary, weary walking with the dead.

I am writing from the veranda on the lake side of "The Flugel." The sunshine is pouring down gloriously, lighting the dark pines and picking out all the colors in the shirt of the Cuttlefish who is weeding beets in the garden below. Yesterday I helped Stepan and Piotr and Casper Caspich land the boat and free the shiny wrigglers from the nets hung on the fence. But to-day it is too heavenly quiet to move more than an eyelash. The Cuttlefish is just the man to watch on such a morning.

It is as peaceful as a Persian garden, an illusion furthered by Ossman, who perches on the veranda railing, waving a plummy black tail, even as a hand-maiden waveth her fan. Ossman is a true Mussulman. His ancestors

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were transported in a basket from Persia by Madame Novinska herself, and with him he brought all the manner of the East.

But Bortnaka is not Persian, despite Ossman; it is the Russianest Russian, a page from Turgenev's own world. The estate, an original grant from the Czar, has been in the family three hundred years. On one side lie three villages, one of them the village which M. Novinsky's father built for his freed serfs. Beyond these lies another great estate belonging to Princess Kalitzina. One may walk all day and never leave the piny forests of Bortnaka itself, but if one proceeds along the lake long enough in the opposite direction from the villages, one comes upon what was once a magnificent place belonging to a member of the Tolstoi family. I believe the famous author visited here as a boy and mentions it in one of his books.

A wing of one of the quarters which belonged to the house serfs is now given over to the country post-office. When Natalya Nikolaievna and I drove over in the troika yesterday for the mail, I begged to peek at the interior of the great house that stretched itself along a hill-crest and overlooked the lake in

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truly regal style. I can't quite take a Russian estate yet without the least bit of thrill; an atmosphere lingers about even the more modest ones, strange to the child from a land where "you are as good a man as I and I'm a better man than you." And this Tolstoi place, even in decay, has the truly and royally Russian grand manner. In America I should have listed the house as seen from the lake as a summer hotel, and that it is soon to become under the direction of an astute manager. It is a loose-jointed house, with innumerable corridors and rooms for the hosts of guests who used to gather from the estates round about, and wings at the sides for the three hundred house serfs once attached to the domain. Beyond lie orchards and broad fields of rye, which employed the ten thousand serfs who went with the estate. Ten thousand "souls," as the Russians say, and all of one's own color! It staggers my imagination, and my grandfather was a slave-owning Southerner.

Only one of the beautiful rooms remains intact—a dining-room paneled in dark Russian oak and carved with the Tolstoi coat of arms, and a little medieval balcony on both sides

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above, where the musicians played during dinner. Madame Novinska has told me of guests riding over to this estate in the old days to hunt wolves or bears all day and dance all night or play at private theatricals in the ball-room, with ladies applauding from the balcony. Just what this mighty Russian feasting and drinking and revelry must have been, with wines and choice viands from the four corners of the earth, and boar-hunting, and ballet-dancers down from Petrograd! A regal old tyranny!

A door in the dining-room not high enough for a man to enter, Natalya Nikolaievna explained: "The serfs must enter there to greet Madame Tolstoi and to receive their silver from her majordomo on Easter morning. Its lack of height insured humility." But this extravagant despotism is of the past. The only one who remembers all those gay days, besides Madame Novinska, is blind now. The Tolstoi family have all scattered. The old Tolstoi house is fallen into decay and, like those who made the hall and the high-ceilinged rooms ring with laughter, it, too, is wrapped in memories.

From the house we wandered across the

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fields to the old Tolstoi church, still lifting its domes and its spires above the high cloister wall. A double row of white birches beckoned above the path that led through the half-open gates. White clouds were floating in the sky above the blue domes, and the golden Russian cross seated a crow. The peace of the dead was over all, a peace so deep, so intense that it quivered like silence; but one was not lonely. One felt near the Russian God. The fragrance of the human and the present lingers, too, about the white walls and the sedgy grasses. A week ago they brought a young soldier home and laid him to sleep, his last sleep, under the silvery birches, where the guns do not roar nor the shells shriek, but all is God's peace. . . . In such a God's Acre the Novinskys, too, sleep their long sleep.

Alexei was waiting for us with reproachful eyes, and we turned home again, straight through the deep, piny forest, vaulting like cathedral arches above our heads for twenty versts. I know a road at Nikko where the arches vault higher, but I know no road that I love so much as this needle-carpeted path through the hush of the forest. The horses love it, too. Orlik, who gallops at the side

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while the others trot, throws up the needles with his flying heels and tosses his head far to the side, as a properly trained outside troika horse should do, as if to say, "This is a Russian road and I am Russian and I love it." Alexei, the coachman, throws back his head, braces his feet, sometimes half-standing and leaning forward, as if he were driving the chariots of the sun, and urges the horses on with strange Russian cries. With his long black beard streaming in the wind, his rose-colored sleeves, and his velvet jacket girt about with a brilliant blue shawl, Alexei looks like a Bakst fantasy.

Alexei, like La Polskaya, is vain; with Alexei, it is an extraordinary pride of his beard. Last winter he kept pointing out his extreme value as a coachman because of his handsome beard. When no higher wages were forthcoming for this superior beauty, he suggested that he might shave it off.

"Do, Alexei," urged Madame Novinska, seriously. "I have never had a coachman without a beard."

About two versts from the house we heard the voices of the raftsmen at work, building the great rafts which every spring the estate at Bortnaka sends down the Volga. A large

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part of the revenue of Bortnaka comes from these huge cuttings of pine and oak, and Mlle. Novinska explained to me how thousands of rubles may lie in knowing how to replant, how to cut the trees properly for the least waste, and also the dread of forest fires. In their newly peeled state, the logs looked like Brobdingnagian piles of taffy straws, fresh and delicious enough to eat. Out on the blue waters of the lake two mammoth rafts were already afloat, the long timbers laid in orderly rows and bound together with young saplings; the same rafts, each carrying a little hut, that we had met on the Volga. I could see them on the river as they floated farther and farther toward Astrakhan. And I could hear the raftsmen's songs ringing out on the river when the little fires were lighted at night, and oftentimes the sound of a gipsy carousal, river giants protesting against the monotony of life and the steppe. And farther and farther down the river they float, by day and by night, and fainter and fainter the songs, until the river widens into the sea.

How near one comes to the heart of life here on this old estate! It accounts for much

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of M. Novinsky's simplicity, the simplicity of people reared away from the marts, which no term in the world could ever cloud; a sense of inherited responsibility which nothing and no person could ever lose. I would burn a thousand tapers to Nicholas the wonder-worker to see him once against this old background—under the roof-tree of his fathers.

To-night there beyond the fields of green, under the eaves at the *izbas*, a peasant girl is singing, a wild wailing melody running like a silver thread through the white night—a melody torn from underneath a woman's heart, an air of unfulfilment. Ah! Dmitri, I understand.

XXI

THE SCORPION'S STING

LIKE scorpions the war stings—far more cruelly here in the country than in the city. To pay taxes, gold and silver—that is one thing—but to cut the sinews of war out of your own flocks and herds! The second commandeering of horses has begun. The ukases have been up for three weeks, and since dawn to-day the peasants have been gathering in the square of the whitewashed chapels under the birches; blotches of gaily kerchiefed women and boys in red and blue *rubashkas* and old men, torpidly assembling. How old a Russian peasant grows! The sky is a compassionate Volga sky, but it looks down on a scene less untroubled. The Government officers have come, smart fellows in khaki riding-trousers; they stand in a cleared space of the grassy street among horses—black and gray and pinto—measuring them with a long pole

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marked with a nail at the proper height. A rather swaggering officer, the younger, with a cropped tan mustache, who would not waltz badly; the other a thick-bodied, red-nostriled man who would make a good fourth at bridge—both thoroughgoing and indifferent to the grumbling of the *muzhiks*.

The older strikes an attitude of authority, pulling at his mustache, legs far apart. "Ny, show me his paces!" he orders, throwing the rope bridle of a gray horse to a lumbering young peasant. Little matter to him if this is the last horse which Ivan Ivanovitch has to plow the grain-land. War is war! As a matter of fact, it is not Ivan Ivanovitch's last horse; he has concealed another in the bushes. But he clambers on him as slowly as if it were and rides him off under the dappling birches. Two foresters pass in fur caps with shrewd glances. The cook comes out from the long, rambling kitchen, dressed in pure white, his mustache turning up like the points of a scimitar, a knife stuck through his belt, and makes a few derogatory comments on the horse. As a matter of fact, the gray proves himself no great steed. Ivan Ivanovitch clambers clumsily off again. "Be-

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sides, he kicks, your Excellency," he offers, cannily. But one officer writes something in a black book and the other marks the horse with a cross of red paint, while Marya, Ivan Ivanovitch's wife, sinks beside the beehive and rocks with her head in her apron. Six from the Novinsky stables are chosen this time, and one of them is Orlik, who gallops at the side in the troika. The peasants watch them indifferently as they are led away. "Neetchevo," they shrug their shoulders. "There is always plenty of everything at the great house."

"How do they feel the war?" I asked of Piotr Pavlovitch, the overseer of the estate, an amorphous-bodied, keen old Russian with shaggy hair and eyes far apart, a mighty bear-hunter in his time.

"The peasants?" He centered his gaze on the uncouth faces filmed over with ignorance. "The Germans are just over that hill there, in their minds, and if they do not fight the *Nyemetzki* will come over the slope and take *all* their horses! He is a shrewd one, the peasant. *Da barishnya* (you have said it). But his world is as big as his own field. Before this war is finished there will be the

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devil to pay." Piotr Pavlovitch strikes off in the direction of the wheat while I turn back to the house.

At night I hear the horses leaving, like a great wind rushing through the wood. Why do they always take them at night? All through the hours I awake with a sense of uneasiness such as I felt in Siberia and that first morning in Petrograd: tides of men streaming down the white path—fragments of song—the trampling of boots and the rumbling of guns; then they all drop into an abyss which gives back nothing.

I love to see Madame Novinska here in the country. In Petrograd and at her great place, the palace of Peter the Great, Madame Novinska is the grand *châtelaine*, but here on this old estate buried in the heart of Russia, with these peasants who have been the responsibility of her father and her father's father before her, she is the simple *barina*. It is a wonderful cultural factor, that inherited sense of *noblesse oblige*, the responsibility of the greater for the less, the powerful for the humble, which we possess so meagerly in America. I find it running all through this "nobleman's nest." Yes, I am aware

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that it is a social and economic maladjustment that has brought about this condition; that it is the lover of brocaded fabrics, of pageants, in me that finds it charming, but I am not sure that it brings out the worst qualities of human beings.

Madame Novinska was returning from a drive to a neighboring estate with her charioteer of the sun when I emerged on the terrace yesterday afternoon. There had been a new and important order posted in the town of O—— and the peasants clustered around her carriage while she read to them slowly, carefully, as one reads to apprehensive children. Perhaps this is the portrait of M. Novinsky's mother that I like most of all: the exquisite contours of her face undimmed, infinitely sad and paling daily with anxiety for Dmitri Nikolaivitch, but looking with eyes tender with Russian tenderness at her other children, the peasants. Madame Novinska belongs to an older generation, but she has always seemed to me to have achieved that toward which our generation struggles: a discriminating and intense personal emotion, but released from the merely personal into that larger love for a people, a race. Beyond her one feels as the

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confrères of Turgenev felt beyond him, as one feels beyond all Russians who love Russia, a shadow; the sense of hopeless yearning over these confused and dim-eyed ones, denied their right to knowledge, and now both a promise and a menace. Some day it will be M. Novinsky's, this responsibility for "souls"—if ever he returns. Every day here throws him into higher relief. I am less certain to misunderstand him, now that I have seen this old Russian background.

Natalya Nikolaievna had come out on the terrace and we stood looking down at the scene in the waning light. It was all like a part in a play—far more like a play than those realistic scenes from Tchekov: Natalya Nikolaievna in her white gown and turquoise shawl, slim, patrician, inexpressibly lovely; the *barina* below moving slowly toward the house, followed by a train of bright kerchiefs and white blouses; and beyond, the lake, the forest purpling in the dusk, the impenetrable background of all this simple patriarchal life. Natalya Nikolaievna caught my glance.

"Fancy, *Amerikanka*," she said, quietly. "In the revolution of 1905 they stoned every one—our own peasants did. They even bolted

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the stable doors and burned our horses and stoned my father. My mother was the only one who could go among the villages. This is medieval Russia. *Ma mère* they count not as human, but one of the saints."

The post has come.

Only a letter from Feodor, Marya's husband, who is a gunner of the battery to which two of the Novinsky horses are attached. The horses "draw bravely," he writes. There are new-comers in the regiment, a little girl of seven and a boy of five. The father had found the mother dead when he returned to the village on furlough. There were no relatives in the village and he carried the children back to the trenches. The soldiers are very kind to them. *Shto dyelatch?* What else was to be done, Feodor asks.

No word from Dmitri Nicholaivitch. I cannot bear staring forever like this into emptiness.

XXII

"THE BARIN RETURNS"

THE whole world has changed its dim hues for the colors of joy! A sweet, mellow old place! The limes are showering the air with fragrance, the earth is carpeted with lilies-of-the valley, a cuckoo called this morning from the edge of the forest. Even the caftan and the beard of the old peasant who plows that point of land seem to blow debonairly. All day the housekeeper jingles her keys among the storehouses; Madame Novinska walked down the terrace to the roses this morning without a cane; Natalya Nikolaievna is peacock-eyed. Old Yarshin, in charge of the bathhouse, is transporting cans of water on long poles over his shoulder. The toothless old *babas* and *batushkas*, sitting in the grassy dooryards, are nodding their heads and whispering. "The young *barin* returns. God's hand is not against us. *Slavu bogu!*"—can it

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be true? The message came to Madame Novinska yesterday. Only Agatha and I are useless, toothless old Agatha rocking and weeping with her head in her apron, and I—I steal away to the forest.

The beloved old forest! Green, veiled with a luminous white, an indescribable ethereal loveliness; black earth, the scent of lilies-of-the valley—everything that is transcendently fresh against all that is immemorially old. Spring comes on the wing, here in Russia, with a sudden rush of joy as nowhere else—the resurrection! The rain has left the forest fragrant, full of moving currents of air and elusive shadows. To-day a flock of yellow butterflies flit through the labyrinths, tremulously pendent like flecks of gold in old liqueur. I follow them swiftly, eagerly, still deeper and deeper into the wood, leaving the needle-carpeted road and open spaces for dim arcades, hung every day with new and delicately moving filigrees.

To-day is a fête-day, and “the maidens neither plait their hair nor the birds build their nests.” The bells in Moscow and Petrograd ring madly to-day from the bell-towers; here in the countryside they call

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tranquilly from the white monastery tower across the lake.

This afternoon, while we were drinking tea on the terrace, under the limes, a peasant woman appeared suddenly at the French windows of the dining-room, a young and comely woman, her gown pinned up above her bare feet and a gay handkerchief tied over her head.

I recognized her as Marya, the “cow-woman,” for I remembered having seen her among the shining dairy things. For a moment she stood in the doorway with a troubled gaze, and then her eyes began to dilate with tears and her hands clutched convulsively at her peasant apron.

“Oh, *barina*,” she cried, throwing herself at Madame Novinska’s feet and sobbing, “they will bury my *malenki*, my baby, to-night! Will not the *barishnya* come and make a picture of him before they lay away my little pigeon?”

Of course I promised to come—my camera has been an open sesame among the peasants—and to-day I could refuse no man aught! The poor mother began kissing the hem of my skirt in passionate gratitude.

Marya had married outside her own village

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and she lived three villages beyond Bortnaka. After tea, Mlle. Novinska and I walked through the vivid green of the rye-fields that "clothe the world and meet the sky" toward the squat, gray-timbered houses folded between the hills. The grassy streets of our own village were peopled with the old *babas* and *batushkas* taking their holiday in the sun, whispering in awestruck tones, "*Malenki*, the little one." How they knew all about it I am unaware. How they know of Dmitri Nikolaivitch I cannot say. The peasant knows everything.

The children were less impressed, and with each village we gained a following of dingily fair little boys in high boots and red-belted Cossack blouses, and shy little blue-eyed girls in pink who hung on the gray gates to open them for us and then fell in behind us. One of the older boys played an accordion and two had *balalaikas*, to the accompaniment of which they sang endless verses, each of which ended in a sharp, up-turning minor, very like the songs of the Chinese river boatmen. What a pageant we would have offered a painter—Bagdanov-Belsky, for instance, with his genius for genre—as we passed through the fields

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of rye, lying glazed and green against the skyline, and poured down into the villages—a chromatic scale of reds, pinks, and yellows, bright embroidery of the hills.

The village where Marya lived was all agog with our coming; the space about the little chapel was crowded with other village mothers, their offspring tugging at their skirts, and among them stood Marya, like a young Rachel, not weeping, but not the less mourning for her dead. We followed her into the little chapel, a crude, whitewashed structure with one window and a primitive ikon.

And there in a white coffin lay a wee blossom of a baby, his long lashes sweeping his cheeks like petals, so inexpressibly exquisite that it seemed he could not have strayed amid such uncouthness; one wondered if his soul, a stranger and dismayed, had not taken flight to nearer kindred. Candles burned at his head and feet, and in his hand was a waxy flower of many petals.

The young mother silently picked up the little coffin and carried it outside. There in a cleared space, surrounded by the other women, she stood like a statue, clasping the precious receptacle in her strong young arms. After

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the pictures were made we waited for her to return the coffin to the chapel, but she put it down only for a moment, tightened the kerchief over her head, and then, taking up her white burden, and followed by half a dozen other women, strode off down the grassy street of this village of wood toward the shore. There are no men in the village and the women must needs bury their dead. The mother placed the coffin in a boat; three or four brawny women clambered in after her and, taking up the oars, they pushed off strongly from the shore. Night was falling and the lake had already begun to darkle in the mists, but through the dusk the white tower of the monastery shone like an angel's wing athwart the sky.

These are the realities, and beside them my life has been filled with phantoms. No more ghosts to-morrow—but for me, too, the white samite radiance of reality?

I had so often imagined him, but never as he came to-day, walking so slowly, so weary, weary, slowly down the forest road. Joy had driven me for refuge to the woodland, but I hid my eyes against the trunk of a pine, seek-

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ing a haven from pain. How young and buoyant, invincible, he had been in those other days! The gallant body was still held proudly, but that faint look of “the man who was”! The forest seemed to rock about me. I could only wait, mute, until he came opposite me in the path and he stopped, regarding me intently.

“I have dreamed you like this—under the trees,” he said, a ghost of the old expression stirring in his eyes. “It is you, *Amerikanka?*”

One of his hands was crushed. He carried his shoulder painfully. But it was his eyes that held the injury, horror that would be his till death, mystery that could never be shared. He leaned against the buttressed trunk of a tree near me—that familiar movement!—as I had seen him often watching the steppe in Siberia, as he had leaned against the malachite column that day in the cathedral. The light fell dimly through the trees on his slim, dark head. It was M. Novinsky of the steppe, M. Novinsky of the islands under the pines, of that night at the ballet. I could have wept for joy at the old known posture.

“How lovely you are in that white frock—here in the forest, *Amerikanka!*”

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My voice was still lingering in forbidden registers, but, looking up into the gray-blue eyes, set in Eastern fashion, I touched the bandaged sleeve gently, very gently with my fingers.

"Neetchevo-pravda. It is of no moment—truth. The fortunes of the day," he said, gently, while his eyes continued to consider me carefully—as if I had been a phantom—and then slowly, wonderingly wandered up to the film of green.

XXIII

REALITIES

WE sat down on an overturned pine and bit by bit the tale came, slowly, with fewer reserves than an Englishman would have shown, with less of "fledgling simplicity," but with Slavic sensitiveness, the repulsion, the terror and fascination, the overwhelming ghastliness—the esthete tasting his emotion.

"You knew of the treachery among Russian officers, a constant giving over of the most important plans to the enemy. There was a scheme among three of us to stop the leakage—three of us who had been friends at school in Petrograd. . . . We all knew that it meant our lives. Not one of us expected to return—I told you—but that was no matter. . . . Russians do not fear to die. We all scattered into different regiments. I chose my own. Do you remember the Cossack who refused to desert his horse in Kashgar? Partially through

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his help, partially through an officer, I went—as a common soldier, later as an orderly.”

M. Novinsky paused and his eyes followed the curve of the lake. “It was worse even than we expected,” he continued, after a silence, speaking slowly and distinctly. “There were terrible things. . . . It was worse than any one could have dreamed this side of inferno. I don’t mean the battle, the fighting—that is bad enough. The eternal guns, the filth, the em-bruting of the whole fabric of life—one gets used to that. But the treachery of officers dribbling all that life through their hands like water. . . . Shells and shells—and no guns. . . . Guns and no shells. . . . Guns and shells that—*Bozhé moi!*—do not fit. . . . Can you imagine what it is to trap men in their trenches empty-handed—to be riddled with shell-fire? . . . To watch them helpless like children—big as oxen—clambering out of the trenches—slow—and dazed—facing German steel, waiting for comrades to fall so that they may take their guns. *Bozhé moi!* There are some things it is necessary to forget. . . . *Nado zabeetch!* Why those young giants did not choke their officers with bare hands! . . . Out of the trenches, wave after wave, helpless

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—bayonet charges against howitzers. A gun is money, but a man is only—a man. All those peasant *babas* in Siberia are breeding men—and in Russia besides—their *raison d'être*. Millions of men for the asking . . . and staff-officers at the back in a wood eating mushrooms. A man is only flesh and blood—*blood—Nom de Dieu!* I shall never forget that slippery field. . . .”

A yellow butterfly winged past us, hanging like a golden mote in the subdued gloom.

“*And when you left the regiment?*” I breathed, tentatively.

Dmitri Nikolaievitch roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen. His voice plodded on. “I was with the regiment ten days, and then it was necessary for some one to go into Germany. We had our observations, but they had to be verified for absolute certainty. It was a matter of lots. We drew before we went, and I had the lucky number. . . . I went. . . . Of that *I can never tell you*. It was difficult, terribly difficult. Luckily I am one Russian who speaks languages as well as we have the reputation for speaking them. I had been at school in Germany—*da*, I know them very well. If my German had been

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less perfect, or if I had ever been for one instant afraid for my life, my life would not have been worth a kopeck. They are efficient but *stupid*. Two weeks I was in Germany, and then I came back. I traveled once in a day-coach with an officer—mainly by night—any way, every way. It was easier getting over than back, I assure you. But I arrived. It was done—what I had set out to do. I could have come home then. I joined the troops again, I don't know why. Perhaps it was only a barbarian's desire to fight." He put his hand to his head with the same troubled gesture of "the man who was." "That was when this came. It is glorious to have something happen to your body after you had seen with your eyes. It's a point—something bright and hard to fix your mind besides *that*. Perhaps I had not counted on lying a day and a night in 'No Man's Land.'" he added, with a smile. "Twenty-four hours of staring up at a rainy gray sky with an occasional one of those oxen-like creatures crawling over one trying to get back to the trenches. And the rain, the everlasting rain—sodden, like Gorky's rains. Andrei was in the same regiment—it was he who found me. . . . Have

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you read the papers two weeks, three weeks, ago? . . . Seven officers—they were hanged."

The forest roared past me like the torrent of a night sea. M. Novinsky sat resting his head on his hand, staring into the depths of the wood. From the distance came the sound of the foresters' singing; the fragrance of lilies-of-the-valley rose from the black earth, sweet and unendurable! But I was far from the forest. I was again on a trans-Siberian train, watching a gaunt figure relaxed against the cushions, his eyes turned moodily on the steppe.

"Dmitri Nikolaievitch"—I found courage, after a silence, looking at the sensitive profile of the man at my side—"he was not one?"

M. Novinsky turned his eyes to me as if to steady me. "He was, *Amerikanka—Proshchajte menya*. . . . It had to be."

As long as I live, the scent of pines or of lilies, the sound of a lake lapping against the shore, will bring two words in a grave, un-English voice, and I shall see a swarthy face framed between candles, the decorations of a uniform gleaming richly like the jewels of the Mother of God.

"The dark door"—it had opened to the General.

XXIV

MISS AMERIKANKA CHOOSES

WE sat in quivering silence, I aching with the incomprehensible futility of life and M. Novinsky staring again with his head on his hands.

"I am happy that America is yours to return to." The voice with its un-English timbre roused itself after a pause. "But you will never forget Russia. It will always remain something tragic, magnetic, to be remembered. . . . Perhaps these are the last days we shall have together—and I must speak out my heart. That is the Slav. It may be that in Peking you have heard that I am a worshiper of women. I am. I worship all beauty. But you are the first woman I have ever known well. . . . You cannot know what it means, you—your joy—against this old unhappiness so intrinsically a part of my fiber. . . . It is unspeakably dear—this experience—unspeakably rare. If I loved you

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less—I should ask more of you. But I prize you as you are—I love you—unique—singular. . . . I tremble lest this Old World cloud your fountain of joy.”

I could not look at M. Novinsky. The terror of night and the steppe seemed flowing over me as on that day at the cathedral. The world without this figure—so simple, so gentle, so subtly understanding—it was dull, unimaginable! Whatever paths of the heart life might lead me into, it would never be this one, desired. I rose from the pine where we had been sitting, putting my hand to my throat to free it from ache. What mattered the world—old or new—without this tender figure—this exquisite sensibility!

“I shall always return.” I tried to choke back my tears. “Something compelled me here—I do not know what—and I shall always return. I love Russia.”

M. Novinsky had risen and we were again on the needle-carpeted road, Orlik’s road, moving toward a little woodland bridge under the high vaulting trees. He stopped now as we came to a turn in the forest road, subdued and fragrant from a thicket of a delicately flowering white bush.

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"Russia has given me a soul," I repeated, avoiding him and looking up at my dim green comrades, the trees, blindly struggling against a cold gray tide. "I shall always return."

M. Novinsky had never kissed my hands before, after the manner of his race; he bent over them as if it were a rite.

"*Américaine*," he said, slowly, searching my face with a terrible earnestness, "Russia is not a land to which one returns with joy. If it were not my own country, perhaps I should love it less than other lands—of sunshine and freedom. If she were at a less crisis—or less unhappy—I might leave her; but as she is now, struggling, upheaved, I am bound to her. You love Russia, but you do not know Russia. The Russia you see is the Russia of to-day; what Russia of to-morrow will be no one knows. We are on the brink of change. Everything one loves and everything one hates is going into the melting-pot, and what will emerge no one can say. In time we shall evolve into a great free nation. *In time*—but what is one man's lifetime in the evolution of a race? For the next hundred years we are going to be the most unhappy people in the world. In my case, if one can envisage the

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personal—a thing I have almost forgotten—it may mean the loss of everything—of estates, of home, even this old Bortnaka. . . . It is a Novinsky tradition of which we are proud—our long fight for Russia's freedom. But we are nobles and the first new uncouth forces of democracy for which we are striving will have little place for us." He added the latter with a whimsical smile, but all the weariness of Asia looked out of his eyes. He was silent for a moment, staring down the road, and the contours of his face sharpened in white lines of pain as he turned again to me. "But you, *Amerikanka*—do you not see, it is cruel to bring you here to this chaos, this change—no one knows what—with your clear title to happiness *there*."

I could feel the taut figure, looking down at me with sea-blue eyes, quivering under the leash. He had resigned me. My choice was in my own hands, but his eyes were compelling me, wistfully questioning, exploring my soul, burning out the very essence of me with the intense emotion of the Slav. And that intensity, the prescience of which had drawn me overseas—that passion of the East—was drawing me now irresistibly to this man lifted

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up in pain before me. I closed my eyes. I was promising myself away, my country, pledging my hope and my ambition. I had a sense of pathos as at the closing of a chapter. That was all. Of irresolution—none. The tender eyes and sensitive mouth—I could hardly see them through a film of tears. I knew that there lay my world, in those fires ready to light at my touch.

“I shall not return—I shall stay in Russia. Whatever your destiny—whatever the destiny of this Old World—it is mine, Dmitri Nikolaievitch. . . . Sonia and Raskolnikoff . . . you know . . . together.”

He was trembling violently as I said the last words, but he put his free hand on my hair and turned me toward him—M. Novinsky of my memory. “Your whole life—do you understand—your whole life?” His voice was steady, but his face was pale and straining, his eyes touched with the mysticism of the Slav.

“My whole life, Dmitri Nikolaievitch.” My soul seemed holding out her woman hands to this dim, questing face and these darkening eyes. “Together.”

“*Moya Amerikanka . . . life . . . together!*”

MISS AMERIKANKA CHOOSES

The passion of the East, sweeping me up in its embrace, lifting me on full flood-tides, wrapping me in mystic fire—his arms closing about me—his body trembling, exquisitely near . . . a torrent rushed through me like the wind in the forest, but at the heart was peace—infinite repose. Strange sweet tides bore me far, far out—out—out—to unknown seas! Something poignant in Russia—yes, I had touched it.

THE END

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